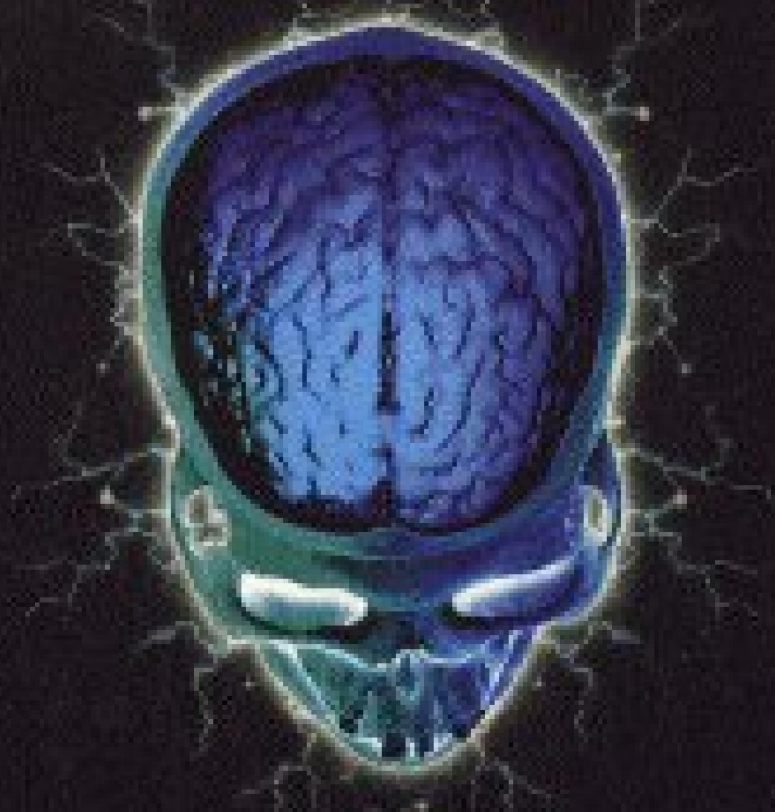
BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE TAINT



MICHAEL COLLIER

The Taint
By Michael Collier

They say it's your beliefs that get you into heaven, not your deeds. Don't they?

For Steve and Luc, Take it from me Mr Wubblewu

1.1
Muriel Krainer Tells Dreams Down Die Phone [1963]

You are kind to indulge an old woman like this. Here am I, going on. I don't get to talk very often- it's a treat, I must say. I'm a little out the way here in Archway, but it's a lot cheaper than further in. Still, as you get older... as your friends move away or lose touch, it's talking you miss most, isn't it? Can't expect Fitz - he's my boy, he's twenty-seven - to stay in the whole time, talking to an old duffer like me; not when he's his age and I'm mine.

It's my own fault, I know. I had him at thirty-eight; the doctors warned me of all the risks when we found out, said I was too old, and with my history... I've not been a well person, really. Up and down, you know, and what with a baby on the way too... But I had Otto then, and we so wanted a child. My husband, yes, that's right. I can see you've been reading my notes, haven't you! No secrets from you, then... Yes, Dr Greenish told me you might call.

Well... if you like. I'll tell you about the dreams, yes. Haven't been asked about them - haven't had them for a few years now, touch wood. Yes, the floating dreams - I know what you meant. I got that feeling of rising above myself, you know, looking at myself there in the bed. 'Course, they said it was the treatment, but it was before the treatment, the first one. Saw myself sleeping, and a right old sight I looked too, with my hairnet, no slap on, in the middle of the night! What he ever saw in me I'll never know. Patience of Job, that man... Yes, my husband. Sorry, the dream; you've got me talking, you see! I warned you, didn't I?

So I'd always start by looking at myself on the bed, then I'd just keep drifting up, through the ceiling, past Fitzie's room - oh, and the things I'd

see him doing some nights, you'd blush, you really would - out into the sky, into the stars. Never felt cold, or anything really, for someone flying through the air in a nightdress. Silly, really, but I'd just keep on going, up and up, until there were no more stars, just skies - different skies, some black, some dark blue, some hazy with light from somewhere... And I'd just drift through them, for ages, just drift. It was always ever so calm, that part of the dream.

Then I'd always feel something was there with me. I'd feel frightened, scared, so different to how I felt before, but, though it always happened the same way, I'd never lose that feeling of calm while the skies changed around me. Yes, like I could never be aware of what was to come, I suppose.

Anyway, I'm there, and this rock arrives, eventually. Starts off really small, but it's big, it's a huge big rock. Then it turns and I can see it's got an entrance - it's like... Yes, that's right, just like a cave, like someone's taken a cave out of a mountainside and put it in the sky. And it comes towards me, and the sky's just one colour now and there's nowhere else to go, and I'm scared so I go inside it. I stop floating then, I have to walk. It's all crunchy under my feet. Rocks and crystals, sparkling in your eyes even when you shut them. The cave roof is all bright, warm and yellow...

Then it gets darker and it's like there's a church inside, rows and rows of people singing some sort of hymn. Strange people: they're all tall, dressed in black robes. Their words are funny... No, not foreign, but like they're... Oh, I don't know, it's like this is their way of crying or something. They don't feel things the way we do, and I know I've got to be quiet, very quiet, or they'll find me, and I don't know what they'll do then.

So I stay at the back and listen, and look around. And there's a face; well, it's sort of like a face. It's got little horns, slitty little eyes, and it's sticking out from the stone above them like it's laughing at them, but it's not got a mouth. Just a round sort of bump there, like a big fat ring with no hole in it. It's getting bigger, and I think they haven't noticed that it's filling the whole ceiling now and I wonder if I should tell them. But then I realise they do know, that that's what they're singing about, that's what they're crying for. The ring gets a hole in it and everyone gets sucked up inside, except me.

I'm back in my bed, but it's inside the cave. It stinks of hellfire and it's full of

bodies like butchers' offcuts, and there are little demons, little devils there, jumping about from body to body, drinking from them. And I scream and scream and I see my great-great-granddad from the scrapbook. He's looking at me... Yes.Yes, I'll be all right again in a minute. Haven't really thought about this in a long time.

You haven't ! Have you really? And a cave just like that one? That is funny, isn't it? You'd think a dream like that...

I suppose so... You're right, it is interesting. I always got sick, though. The longer the dreams went on, the harder it was to wake back up from them. Used to be scared to go to sleep sometimes, after they let me back out... Otto had gone by then, poor love, and my Fitz would come home roughed up day after day. They used to call me and him all sorts of names, you know, the kids and the mums. Every name under the sun, and some that weren't. like they were scared.

When I got ill the third time, poor Fitzie was put in care. It was hard for him - he's a sensitive boy. Oh, yes, he's a tonic, but it's the talking I miss, you know. Still, I can't expect him to sit in every night and talk to an old dear like me, can I? No! No, you're right, it must have its fling.

What? Oh, I couldn't, really... Yes, I suppose it would be company... But I don't know if... Oh, you can't send a driver for me, Dr Roley, goodness, I'll get the bus... No, that's no trouble.
Oh goodness, well... Well, I suppose... Oh, Dr Roley, you are good, indulging an old lady like this.

THE TAINT

2.1

Life was a never-ending series of dramas, some big, some small. The same dramas, experienced again
and again by different people all through history. Only the trappings and circumstances changed. You got a job. You bought a house. You met someone. You got married and moved into their house. You had an affair. You got the wrong person pregnant and they married your best friend. You wished you could marry your best friend.

Whatever, the point of it was that life was essentially a tried and tested series of dramas, with only a finite number of responses. People coped, or they were swamped. They made the wrong moves, took the right choices, made things worse and sank ever deeper or rose above their despair. Millions of people had proved this to be the measure of life, and proved also that the measure of the man was in how he lived it.

Why, thought Fitz Kreiner, wasn't I born one of them?

If this was a drama, it wasn't a good, solid BBC effort, with all the posh voices and the weighty values. He felt stuck in a commercial break in his life drama. It could well be one of ITV's salacious Armchair Theatre programmes, and that would be wonderful, but he hadn't been paying proper attention and he'd never know until the damned bloody thing started again. In the meantime, Come to Roley's Gardens of Paradise was the only word from his life's sponsor. Roll up, roll up and buy a shrub, or an earthenware pot of the highest quality. A potted plant for your home from our nurseries. Make it a part of your landscape, stage domestics round it. Live your life and its dramas, and Fitz here will hang around outside, helping to make it prettier for you.

What made it worse was that the opportunities for life's back-from-the-break signature tune to kick in had never seemed greater. Since Dr Roley - underweight and overprotected son of the late Quentin Roley, millionaire nurseries tycoon and spectral sponsor of Fitz's current existence - had taken in Fitz's old mum for his studies, he'd had his own gaff for the first

time in his life. Space. Freedom. Even a bit of cash in his pocket. Looking after number one for a change, instead of her the whole time. He'd done his best for her, of course, done his stir; and now Roley was actually paying for the pleasure of putting her up! Fitz had never figured there was much cash potential in having a mum who was barking, but... Well, he wasn't going to argue. And the old dear had never been happier.

Fitz sighed, and lit up a cigarette. That was meant to be end of Act One, he thought, pushing a hand through his unkempt, dark hair. Not the big finale.

A girl walked past, attractive, brunette, with a perfectly sculpted bob.A snub nose, wide eyes and bright-red lips. A tight sweater and a blue skirt. She glanced at him. Fitz straightened up and smiled a smile that intimated he knew a secret or two, that he was, perhaps, not all he appeared to be, leaning casually against a picnic table in the grounds of a stately home in West Wycombe. That he was so much more than...

The girl walked past without a second look and on to the hanging-basket section.

Bugger, thought Fitz. Another bloody advert for what I'm missing out on. How about giving me the chance to go get some for myself?

He glanced at his watch. Ten to ten. The day stretched ahead before him without relief. Good of Roley Jr to fix him up with work here to keep an eye on the old lady, but... Why couldn't Daddy have been an art dealer? Or run a top model agency? Or have been the owner of an internationally renowned casino?

Yeah, that would do: Fitz Kreiner, croupier and card sharp, shaping the dramas in the tortuous lives of the world's most exclusive clientele. He'd see it all... Bankruptcy. Lucky streaks. Lifestyles on the line in the throw of a dice. And him, in white tuxedo and black tie, indomitable and aloof. Even so, looking over at the slinky girls draped on the arms of these would-be winners, a man not entirely averse to getting his hands dirty once in a while... A blonde caught his eye. That mink stole she wore spoke of a habit her loser boyfriend couldn't afford to support after the way Fitz had dealt 'em out tonight. She smiled back at him, a knowing look in her eye.

'Go and put more compost on the pot plants, Fitz,' called the dispassionate

voice of Mrs Simms, his supervisor. 'And put that cigaretteout . How many times do you need telling?'

But no, thought Fitz, he set up a collection of plant nurseries. Thank you, Quentin Roley, and your mad professor son.

Fitz sneaked a final drag on his cigarette and then smiled an apology at Mrs Simms, who merely grimaced in response. Compost, he thought to himself, and sighed. Those dramas keep on coming. Where was I? Oh yeah, getting my hands dirty. Right. Soap ad, then... He slouched off, away from Mrs Simms's disapproving gaze. 'Roll on Act Two, God,' he muttered. 'Please ...'

He decided to approach the pot plants via the hanging-basket department, keeping an eye out for the blue skirt and the sweater.

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In a nearby glade bright with sunshine, birds clattered from the trees as a mechanical grating and wheezing cut through the tranquillity. Finally, with a reverberating thud, a police box appeared.

The weathered blue doors were flung open and a man emerged, whistling noisily. 'Come on, Sam!' he shouted, peering back into the box as if he'd lost something.

'Is it sunny?' a clear, female voice came back as if from some way away. Had anyone been watching they may well have wondered how such a small box could contain such odd acoustics.

'It's a beautiful day, quite beautiful.' The man sniffed the air appreciatively. He had light-brown hair that hung in lazy curls, a long pale face with thin lips that made him appear quite supercilious at first glance. His eyes were a pale blue, sad-looking, but, as he smiled, his whole face lit up like a child's at Christmas.

'What are you grinning at, then?' The young woman who had shouted earlier, Sam, had peeked out behind him. She was wearing a pale-green dress, sleeveless with a high neckline. It came down to just above her knees, while her black suede boots came to just below them.

The man said nothing.

'Doctor?' She tugged on his long, bottle-green velvet coat.

'It's sunny,' replied the Doctor.

'It's not Benidorm,' said Sam.

'It's England.'

Sam looked around her as the birds flew cautiously back into the trees. 'Been a long time,' she said. It had been years since she'd first started travelling with the Doctor, three of them spent without him on the alien equivalent of Skid Row. Ever since then (about six months ago now by her trusty awkwardly-beeping-at-the-wrong-moment digital watch) the Doctor - or the TARDIS, or perhaps the pair in collusion - had seemed careful to avoid her home planet. They had spent a long time apart, and she couldn't help thinking that perhaps her friend had been a little worried that she'd be vanishing off home the first chance she'd got. She'd not been back to Earth for years.

And now here she was. England, twentieth century, home. Sam had to admit it was something of an anticlimax.

'I guess you can't go home again after all,' she said, sadly.

"This isn't your home,' replied the Doctor. 'If anything, it's more mine than yours.'

'It's not 1997?'

'It's 1963.1 spent quite some time here, a long time ago.'

Sam felt a sudden sense of relief. Her parents would be kids in this time. She wouldn't have to agonise over calling, explaining, letting them see how she'd changed. They wouldn't even meet for another ten years.

She smiled.'So - the Swinging Sixties!'

The Doctor smiled back. "They've embarked on a degree of motion, yes.'

'Well, let's move with them, man.' Linking arms with the Doctor, she steered them out of the glade and on to a path. 'So you've lived here before, have you? I bet you were a real hip swinging cat, weren't you?'

'Sam, Sam, Sam, please...' said the Doctor, shaking his head. 'You really are exaggerating the idiom of the period. 'They left the glade behind them in sunny stillness once more. 'And anyway,! was more an arthritic old buzzard than any cat you might happen to mention...'

A few moments later, a man shambled into the clearing, crazed eyes staring about him. The birds flapped noisily away from their branches once more in alarm.The man slumped heavily against the police box, a thick string of dribble escaping from his grinding teeth as he looked wildly around him.

Breathing raggedly and deeply, he took the same path out of the clearing.

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Sam tutted. 'A garden centre. Back on Earth for the first time in centuries and you take us to a garden centre.'

The Doctor looked a little embarrassed. 'Well, it's set in very attractive grounds.'

Sam said nothing. She was looking around her at the people strolling by, at the fashions she thought of as retro chic being worn for real with no affectation. Her travels in the TARDIS often left her feeling she was on a huge film set. It was quite pleasant to feel like she'd moved off the Terminator back lot and found herself on Summer Holiday .

She looked at the Doctor's own outfit, his starched wing-collar shirt and cravat, his Edwardian breeches. For the first time in a very long while she found herself feeling a little embarrassed to be seen with him.

Still, she thought, who gives a toss?

'Oh, look!' With a stifled gasp that could’ve been of pain or delight, the

Doctor suddenly rushed over to a flower bed. Sam watched him, completely engrossed in a world of his own. How many times had she felt he was just like a kid playing in the biggest playground there was? Sometimes she felt it was she who was looking after him on their adventures, not the other way around. He'd probably spotted a ladybird or something.

'I'm going to walk around the park here, or whatever it is,' she called over. She received no reply as the Doctor continued fussing to himself over whatever he had found. 'If you get lost without me, wait for me at the lost-child desk, OK?'

'Mm, mm,' said the Doctor vaguely, nodding without looking round.

Sam shrugged and smiled as she pulled aside some conifer branches and stepped back into the sunlight.

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'It's like something, you know, out of R.J. Tolkien.'

Fitz regarded the large woman as she proudly patted the head of her newly wrapped garden gnome, his face blank. First compost, now an ignorant old biddy who wouldn't go away. She'd spent the last ten minutes making snide remarks about his appearance, his goods and possibly his morals, and now expected to have a friendly chat with him just because she'd bought something.

The woman was still looking at him, and it took him a few moments to realise he was meant to respond. He pulled back his lips in an attempt at a smile, but it rapidly twisted into a noisy yawn.

'You mean J.R.R.,' he got out, as the yawn died away.

'I'm sorry?'

Fitz sighed. Tourists. They weren't too good with accents, he'd come to realise, particularly his French one, which he was employing to divert himself today. He tried again. 'I think you mean J... R
-'

The woman squealed with delight, her fat face furrowing into a grin bigger than anything in England. ‘You mean there's an R.J. Tolkien Junior? How neat!'

Fitz kept his face deadpan and lit up a cigarette. 'RJ. conceived him in France. He slept with a beggar woman in the Boulevard Saint Germane. The only tooth in her head was made of gold, and they pawned it to buy diapers.' At the woman's gasp of appropriate astonishment, Fitz leaned forward conspiratorially. 'The woman's name was Frodo.'

The woman gasped. 'You're kidding me!'

Fitz exhaled a cloud of bluish smoke into the woman's grimace. 'There are many women called Frodo in France. It was my own mother's middle name.'

'I have got to visit your country!'

Fitz nodded with a smile, and pushed away a clump of straggly brown hair from his eyes aa he pulled out a brown paper bag from under the counter. 'You old bag, you're so ugly...' he muttered.

The woman's face hardened. 'What did you say?'

Fitz looked up, his grey eyes wide and innocent. 'This bag. It fits him snugly. Au revoir!'

The woman took the proffered parcel with a confused smile and waddled off along the leafy path in the direction of the tea rooms.

'People,' sighed Fitz lazily, watching her go."They're all so... stupid!

'That's a gross generalisation, surely,' came a polite, quiet voice that somehow made Fitz spin round as if he'd been given an order. 'I'd like this begonia, please.'

The man was looking at him. There seemed something slightly aloof about his manner, about his whole bearing; a sense of detachment from the quiet and the greenery about them. Only the eyes seemed definite, anchored on

to his own as if peering inside him.

'This begonia?' Fitz broke eye contact and studied the plant. 'But it's nearly dead.'

The man smiled, and Fitz wondered, looking at the stranger's strange clothes and shoulder-length hair, if this man was some kind of dropout himself.

'I know,' said the man. 'I intend to rescue it.'

'Rescue it?'

'Indeed. You could call it a calling.'

Fitz regarded him with his long-practised look of studied boredom. 'A calling.'

'Oh, you just did. Do you simply like my turn of phrase, or were you raised by parrots?'

Fitz realised with a surge of annoyance that his own act was being turned back on him. 'One and six for the begonia,' he muttered with a puff of a cigarette smoke.

'One and six,' sighed the stranger. 'The price of compassion.' The man's face crumpled into a sorrowful frown as he checked the pockets of his dark-green velvet jacket. 'I don't have one and six. Would tuppence suffice?'

'Can't do that,' said Fitz, vaguely, the hint of a jobsworth smile on his lips and glancing about to see if anyone else was in sight. He noticed some old women strolling towards his stall and found himself looking forward to the boredom of their presence.

'Oh please,' begged the strange man, looking longingly at the begonia.

'One and six or it goes back.'

'But I only want to help it -'The man broke off and stared at him, suddenly baffled. 'Why are you putting on that French accent?'

Fitz felt his face redden as the old women approached closer. He affected anger as the cause for this rush of his dubiously Gallic blood. 'How dare you -'

'On peut apprendre d'un grand homme meme lorqu'il se tait ,' said the stranger, suddenly, before looking at him expectantly.

Fitz realised he was expected to reply. Or had that been gibberish? He opened his mouth mechanically a couple of times as he thought desperately how to regain control of the situation. Finally he straightened up, stubbed out the cigarette, smiled at the old ladies now queuing patiently behind this loony, and with accent and dignity only barely intact, glared at the man with the infuriatingly bright smile.

'All right.' Fitz held out his hand. 'Tuppence.'

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Sam could see a large, imposing mansion some way off. She was clearly in its grounds, and wondered if she was trespassing. It was too warm a day to feel too worried, though. She'd be able to give anyone who was bothered enough flannel to get out of it and back to the Doctor. Piece of cake.

' "What do you do, when you need to use the loo, in an English country garden..."' She grinned broadly as she stopped singing. She felt so relaxed, safe, for the first time in weeks. Earth . It was comforting, now, the word, when it had been worrying her for months.

Then she saw a man running towards her, moaning and yelling. Her first thought was of some cartoon gamekeeper, furious at this intrusion on his property. Then she just felt scared. As he got closer she could see froth in his mouth. His pale shirt was wet through, his hair was unkempt and his eyes were wild and staring. Something was wrong. He looked like a nutter.

And he was showing no sign of slowing down.

'Here we go, then,' muttered Sam, turning on her heel and sprinting back towards the gap in the conifers.

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'Thank you for your help,' said the oddly dressed man, sweetly, picking up his pathetic begonia.

Fitz forced a smile. "That is fine,' he said, although his put-on accent now sounded ridiculous even to his own ears. He was still red in the face. Still, at least the old dears queuing behind seemed more interested in their rubber plants.

'I do hope you enjoy your stay in this country,' the man added, clearly enjoying himself. 'Whereabouts in France are you from?'

Fitz winced inwardly. 'Toulouse,' he muttered.

'Oh, Toulouse!' remarked the old lady behind this nuisance. 'I went there last year on my holidays!'

'It's splendid there, isn't it?' said the stranger, nodding enthusiastically. 'I know it very well. Tell me, whereabouts in Toulouse are you from, Mr -'

Suddenly there were screams from somewhere behind them. Fitz spun round but the view was hidden by a huge display of rose bushes and climbers. Turning back to his tormentor, he saw the man was already sprinting off towards the sound of the disturbance, leaving the bewildered old woman clutching his begonia as well as her rubber plant.

Just as the stranger reached the display, a blonde, skinny legs and a green dress, piled through the roses at speed. Swerving at similar speed to avoid her, the stranger spun and fell backwards into some aspidistras. Behind the blonde came a snarling man, in a real state by the look of him, jumping over the startled figure at his feet. Had the girl nicked something off him, or -

'Get out the way,' snapped Fitz at the old women, his French accent forgotten. 'Move it, come on!' He tried to shepherd the old dears away, waving his arms at them. The blonde had reached his desk, had swung herself round it, was facing him. She looked worn out - not bad-looking, though. There was a cry: the old woman had fallen over, while her mate was tottering off calling for the police. He looked back at the blonde. She

was trying to say something but she was out of breath, pointing behind him, and of course , the mad fella was-

Coming straight at him.

Fitz didn't even have time to cry out as he turned round. The man cannoned into him, crashing into the cash desk and carrying Fitz right over the top of it with him. He saw the man's eyes rolling, felt drool on his face as his attacker spasmed in a wild assault. Fitz was surprised he couldn't actually feel any pain - in fact, he felt very calm and detached considering a raving loony was punching and kicking him.

'Let go!' Fitz finally managed to gasp at the man. 'Let go, for God's sake!'Then he realised the man couldn't because Fitz was holding him, round the waist. He yelled as he realised and let the man go, but by then the begonia guy had grabbed hold of the struggling nutter, and was pulling him over to some grass, trying to calm him down, muttering soothing words that Fitz couldn't quite catch.

The blonde was looking at him, offering out a hand to help him up, still puffing and panting. In fact, he found himself watching her chest rising and falling under the green fabric for some time, dazed.

'I'm Fitz; he said.

'Sam.'

'I like your dress, Sam,' Fitz said distantly, at length.

'And what do you think of my tits?' said Sam, raising an eyebrow.

Fitz reddened. 'Sorry,' he added hastily. 'I'm just in shock.'

'Right. You'd better stay there, then,' the girl muttered, going over to check that the old woman was all right. 'I fouled up, Doctor,' she called over to Begonia Man. 'Stupid of me. I led him here, into all those people.'

'Is the old woman all right?' Sam's doctor asked as he peered into the eyes of the loony who was now lying flat on his back on the grass, whimpering.

'OK, I think.'

'And my begonia?'

'Yours, is it? Unlucky. Squashed flat.'

'Oh.' The Doctor looked over at Fitz, his face anxious. 'No chance of a refund, I take it?'

Fitz shook his head in disbelief. The world had gone mad. Attempting to sit up, he suddenly realised how much he hurt. 'No one ask me if I'm all right, will you?' he moaned.

'Oh, how could you not be?' said the Doctor, with an innocent smile.' Anyone from Toulouse is all right with me.'

2.2

'Crikey Moses , what on dearest Earth has happened here?'

Sam looked up. She saw a tall man, practically pencil-thin, hurrying along towards them wringing his hands in a theatrical manner. He looked... well, snooty. At his side was a more rotund woman, dressed plainly in a mid-length navy-blue dress and a white crocheted cardigan. In one plump hand she was hefting a bag - a brown leather affair with a red cross on it - that was so large she doubted the man would be able even to lift it.

As he came closer she could make out more details. Hair just too sandy-coloured to be ginger, and receding. Glasses with thick plastic frames, and a mouth that showed off equal amounts of gum and buck teeth whenever he opened it. Not a handsome man, she thought, but then his missus wasn't exactly an oil painting. She had to be in her early forties, a few years older than the man. She had light-brown hair that was piled up on top of her head in a kind of bun, and eyes that were just too close together. Sam hated that in people: it always made her stare at them more than she should. Even now the woman's eyes were meeting her own with a look of disapproval. She smiled sweetly anyway - just as the man the Doctor was holding went really mental, shouting at the top of his voice.

'You're all dead! Meat and maggots in my death cave!'

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Fitz stared in astonishment as a tirade of bad language followed the threat. The man's lips were protruding as he snarled and dribbled.

'"The torrents of Satan shall reach to all... sides... of the world! "'

The man seemed frantic for breath, so crimson in the face that Fitz wondered if he were about to sprout horns.

'Mr Kreiner! What on Earth is the meaning of this?'

Fitz turned to see Mrs Simms staring in agitated horror at the tableau before her. He had to admit she had fair reason to. The kiosk was knocked

over, and a man was swearing and struggling in the arms of some refugee from a fancy-dress shop who was ripping open his shirt collar, either to help him breathe or throttle him into silence more effectively. Meanwhile, a mouthy blonde was hovering over some over toppled pensioner and now Dr Roley himself had turned up with his ever-faithful Nurse Bulwell. Oh, and the only one of her employees in the whole sorry mess was sitting flat on his arse on a sack of compost.

'May I take my lunch break now, Mrs Simms?' Fitz inquired.

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'Kindly explain to me this incident!' said the woman Fitz had called Mrs Simms. Sam guessed she was someone high up in this place, impotent with fury at all this going on without her written consent in triplicate.

'Explanations can wait,' Sam yelled. 'We need help. Call an ambulance, and find out who was with this poor old lady.' Sam jerked a thumb behind her. 'My guess is she ran off that way.' Sam realised Mrs Simms was simply staring at her. 'Well, go on, then!' she added, widening her eyes.

'Thank you, dear,' said the old woman with a toothless smile as Mrs Simms flounced off in a huff.

'You're welcome,' said Sam, smiling back. Then she noticed Fitz looking at her, a broad grin on his face.

'You know, I've wanted to talk to her like that for weeks!' he said. 'Unreal!'

Sam hid her pleasure under brusqueness, trying not to smile. 'Try your charms on this woman, now, would you? You can impress her with your bravery in stopping slobber-jaws here.'

'What's his problem, anyway?' Fitz mused, supporting the old lady a little awkwardly. 'There you go, love. Do you want a fag?' Fitz reached with one hand for the cigarettes in his shirt pocket.

'No, she doesn't,' snapped Sam. 'Stay there.'

Fitz watched her cross over to Roley and his madhouse on the grass.

'What d'you think of her, then?' he asked the old woman.

'Modern girl,' she sniffed. Then she smiled again. "There're Woodbines in my bag, dear. Fish us one out, would you?'

***

Sam hovered uncertainly over the Doctor and the man he held, who was flailing his arms around as if trying to pluck phantoms from the air. Her shadow fell thick and dark over them, and the Doctor looked up at her, flashing her a brief smile. She saw the concern on his face.

'Crikey Moses,' said the thin man. 'Here, let me in there. I don't know who you are, Mr -'

'Doctor. What have you got in that bag, Mr -'

'Doctor! Dr Charles Roley. And you, sir?'

'I think we'll let the introductions wait till later,' said the Doctor, airily.

'Oh, do you indeed!' The chubby-faced woman had a northern accent, and her voice was as fierce as the scowl on her face.

'Indeed!' agreed the Doctor emphatically, noticing the bag. 'Now, what do you have in there?'

'I'll thank you to mind your own -'

'It's all right, Maria. I'll handle this.' So saying, Roley fought to undo the clasp on the medical bag.

Sam stared at the bizarre couple before barging between them. 'Here, let me,' she said, popping open the clasp with one deft movement.

'Quickly, quickly,' urged the Doctor. Suddenly the sick man writhed with still more desperation, his back arching. 'What's his name, tell me.'

'A moment ago you suggested we leave the introductions until later,' said Maria.

While Sam spared her a dark look, no one else was paying attention.

'His name's Austen, Oscar Austen,' said Roley as he rummaged through the bag.

'What's wrong with him?' asked Sam.

Roley looked up and gave her a gummy smile of apology. 'Old Nobodaddy's moving his bones again, it seems.'

He looked just like the dad-from-hell sort you'd never want to pick you up from a school disco, all chummy and prattish. 'Sorry?'

'I'm rather afraid he thinks he's the devil.'

'Now, whatever's given him that idea?' the Doctor asked smoothly. Sam watched him hold out a hand for Roley to put something into it. 'Paraldehyde. Come on, man, quickly.'

Austen's mouth flapped open and shut, his saliva frothing, eyes screwed up tight. "The bases of mountains shall blaze ..."' Suddenly he fixed the Doctor with a mad stare. 'Cave... the devil takes you there. Yellow sky, stink of sulphur, crystals bright in the rocks.'

Sam saw the Doctor's face cloud into concern as he put his ear to the babbling man's mouth. Austen's words were becoming harder and harder to fathom, until suddenly he started laughing as he spoke, his words losing coherency. Sam shuddered. 'Calm him down, for God's sake,' she said. 'He could bite off his tongue.'

'She's right,' said the Doctor, sitting back up, his face pensive.

'Five mo's - five and a half mo's - I'll be right with you,' muttered Roley as he prepared a syringe. He leaned over Austen, narrowly avoiding a flailing arm in the face. 'Here, let me.'

'Sam, hold his arm down,' snapped the Doctor. Gingerly, Sam complied, grabbing Austen's clenched fist and using all her weight to keep it down on the grass. While the Doctor cooed soothingly, Roley administered the drug.

Austen jerked spasmodically a few more times, then finally lay silent, his head lolling loosely.

The Doctor gently manoeuvred Austen into a semi-prone position on the grass. 'Now,' he said, rising to his feet and taking off his velvet coat, bunching it up, and placing it under Austen's head. 'We need some kind of dopamine inhibitor, haloperidol or -'

Nurse Maria bustled up. 'This patient is in our care, Doctor whoever-you-are,' she said. 'I'd thank you to let us look after him as we see fit:

The Doctor advanced on her angrily. 'And does that include allowing the poor devil to run amok in the grounds of this building, terrifying the public and risking injury both to them and to himself?'

'He's one of my case studies,' said Roley, nervously positioning himself between the Doctor and Maria. 'Diagnosed schizophrenic. And, for your information, he's officially cured.'

'Cured?' echoed Sam, incredulous.

'Oh yes.' Roley scowled. 'It's really inexcusable of the man not to take his tricyclics. I'm researching him, him and some others.'

'Researching? How?' asked the Doctor.

'Psychotherapy, deep hypnosis. I'm exploring his illness.' The Doctor looked impassively at him, and Roley went pink. 'Really, I'm just putting him up in my house while he helps my studies, that's all. I can't keep him locked up like a prisoner, can I? I mean -'

'You don't need to justify yourself to them, Charles,' said Maria.

'No, indeed you don't,' said the Doctor, affably. 'After all, we were just two more innocent bystanders at risk from your carelessness.'

While Roley looked quite pathetically crestfallen, Maria ignored him. 'Help me carry him back to the house,' she instructed, and Roley moved to obey.

'Just a minute,' said Sam, blocking their way. "There's an ambulance

coming for him.'

The Doctor moved behind her, placing a hand on each of her shoulders. 'And, unless you want us to point it in your direction rather than simply allow it to take away the poor old lady over there, I suggest you tell me more."

'Doctor!' cried Sam, disbelievingly. 'You can't just -'

The Doctor nodded furiously and shut his eyes, anticipating her arguments. 'Yes. Yes, I can. I have to, Sam. There's... Well, you heard what he said...'

'Oh, what? '

He looked at her innocently. 'I said, "You heard what he -"'

Sam turned her back on him in disappointment. Again she felt the Doctor's hands pressing on her shoulders.

'Sam here will help clear things up with the emergency services,' he announced to no one in particular.

Will I? she thought. Fine. Thanks for asking.

'Oh... I'd better help... Samantha, is it?' said Roley.

'I prefer Sam.'

'Oh, but Samantha's so much prettier!' he protested, ignoring her pained face. 'I own these nurseries and the grounds. I'll calm down Mrs Simms, assure her it's nothing to worry about. She'll listen to me.'

'Splendid,' said the Doctor. 'Then I'll help Maria -'

'Nurse Bulwell,' she intoned, the words sounding as heavy as she was.

'I'll help Nurse Bulwell take Mr Austen back to your delightful Gothic folly.' He rubbed his hands together and asked politely, 'Would you like to take feet or arms?'

Sam watched the Doctor and Bulwell carry off the sleeping man, and sighed. Never a moment's peace. Not even at a garden centre.

Roley wandered off to placate Mrs Simms as she reappeared from behind the conifers, and Sam wandered over to where Fitz and the old lady sat on the paving, calmly and contentedly smoking their cigarettes. She made a point of coughing.

'Oh, sorry, did you want one?' asked Fitz.

'What I want,' said Sam, slumping down beside him.'is some time off:

'A night out; said Fitz, apparently deep in thought. 'You're new in town, aren't you?'

Sam eyed him warily. 'You could say that, I suppose.'

'Then when I knock off, how about letting me show you how good it looks painted red?' said Fitz, grinning rakishly.

Sam considered. A siren signalled the approach of the ambulance. 'Maybe,' she said. 'But any more lines like that and you'll be going home in that thing.'

2.3

Roley was seated now in a plush red leather armchair, apparently trying to assume an air of nonchalant professionalism - something the Doctor was able to demonstrate with no effort at all. He peered round the man's office with polite interest, perched on a high-backed wooden chair.

Sam looked round too as the Doctor and Roley started talking. Watercolours in old oak frames vied with expressions of abstract colour on huge canvases. Old books lined the shelves. Large windows flanked by stately drapes looked out over the tranquillity of the grounds. Sam was reminded vaguely of the last posh house she'd been in, Norton Silver's place, years ago. That was the thing with art and antiques, she decided. You could be anywhere between 1998 and 1938, and places like this would look practically the same.

'You've got six of them? Here?' asked the Doctor, letting out a low whistle. 'Quite a collection.'

Sam's ears pricked up, and she suddenly wondered what they were talking about.

'Six,' affirmed Roley. 'For the last two months. All of them with the same essential psychosis.'

'They believe they've been possessed by the devil?' asked Sam.

'Certain of it; said Roley with a kind of schoolboy glee. 'But it's more than just some kind of schizophrenia. I looked through scores of case studies, and found myself thinking, "'Roley old boy, there's something a little queer going on here."'

'Which was?'

'Which was, these people - there were more than six, but the others are dead or untraceable now, I'm afraid - have lived in and out of mental homes and hospitals, poor creatures. And each has experienced the same delusion in their manias. Their accounts all match, practically word for word in some cases.'

'Really?' The Doctor cocked his head to one side. 'And what was the delusion?'

'Some babble about a weird old cave, though I'm certain no such place exists.' He laughed, a high-pitched, fluting sound.

'Some form of echolalia?'

'Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly. But it's fascinating, don't you think, that these individuals should share not only the same basic mania but also retain specific memories of an undoubtedly fictional place, when they've been billeted everywhere from Aberystwyth to Norfolk? One of my subjects has even had the most vivid dreams on the subject, night after night.'

The Doctor grinned. 'You have a theory, don't you, Dr Roley?'

'I do indeed. Tell me, Doctor...?'

'Doctor.'

'Doctor Doctor?'

'It's ironic, isn't it?" piped up Sam. 'We often laugh to ourselves.'

'It's why I prefer just "Doctor",' said the Time Lord, affecting embarrassment.

Tell me, Doctor,' said Roley, swiftly moving on. 'Are you familiar with the writings of Jung?'

'Dear Carl,' said the Doctor, smiling.

'Well... you'll be aware he felt it ambiguous at times to differentiate the illness from its cause.'

'In mental illness,' rejoined the Doctor, 'he felt that regression of the libido allowed memory associations by means of which further development could take place.'

'The patient gets ill to get better?' asked Sam.

'Quite, young lady, a first-class summation. Freud saw such regression as an illness, but Jung saw it as a practical attempt on the part of the injured mind to rectify itself.'

'How does that fit with anything?' said Sam, wishing she wasn't asking quite so many questions in front of the Doctor.

'It may be a little unfashionable these days, but, like Charcot and his pupils, I believe in a combined vision of body and soul: a psychology dependent on neurology and vice versa. And I believe the key here to be a collective unconscious, Samantha,' said Roley, becoming more confident and relaxed as he warmed to his theme. 'The dumping ground of all human experience.'

'Race memory,' she said.

'"A living system of reactions and aptitudes determining the individual life in invisible ways", if I recall Jung correctly.' Roley tapped a pencil against his lips. 'I don't know how this cave image manages to tally, but there can be few things more essentially primordial and present in the racial unconscious than fear of the devil.'

'How could convincing themselves they're the devil help them to get better?' asked Sam, feeling a chill run through her.

'How indeed? Sounds a little morbid, doesn't it,' said Roley, chuckling. 'But I feel perhaps some kind of outside influence could have been brought to bear in some fashion.'

'What kind and in what fashion?'

'That, indeed, is the question, Samantha.'

Sam was feeling more and more uneasy. Roley wasn't endearing himself to her; he might just as well have been talking about the weather, he was so casual. These were people, sick people. Bloody sick people, by the sound of it. She didn't fancy meeting them much, but equally she didn't like the way

Roley was studying them so clinically. What was he doing it for?

The Doctor was perhaps reading her thoughts. 'So,' he said. 'You intend to find some form of correlation.'

'Indeed.' Roley grinned his gummy grin.

'How?'

'Oh, through a variety of means, a variety of means.' Roley looked shifty all of a sudden, thought Sam. 'Counselling sessions, group therapy, associations, psychodramas...'

'Does that mean what I think it does?' said Sam, sharply.

Roley looked between them.

'You've been making them re-enact past traumas?' asked the Doctor.

'I believe it beneficial to -'

Sam cut across him, eyes darting across at the Doctor. She could feel the old double act shifting up a gear, and almost smiled. 'Beneficial? You said they were cured.'

The Doctor joined in: 'Beneficial to the book you're writing on them, perhaps?'

Roley fiddled with his tie. "These poor unfortunates form a unique case study. There's never been anything like -'

Sam leaned forwards. 'And that allows you to poke them with a stick and make them jump, does it?'

'Enough of this!' Roley stood up suddenly. 'Please.'

The Doctor exhaled, heavily. 'You're playing with fire and brimstone, Dr Roley.'

Roley rubbed the back of his neck as he sat back down. "These people are

here as my paid guests, not as patients needing care.'

'Nor as guinea pigs, surely?' said Sam.

'I hardly feel I need your sanction, given the circumstances,' said Roley, irritably. 'I'm truly sorry for your experiences with Mr Austen, and grateful for your assistance. But really, my hospitality does not extend to enduring your ill-informed abuse.'

'Sod your hospitality,' muttered Sam under her breath. 'I think we could do with some fresh air, now, thanks Dr Roley,' she added more loudly.

'Splendid idea,' offered the Doctor. 'Off you go and look round.'

Sam stared at him, hands on hips. 'You're not coming?'

'Not just yet.'

Sam moved closer to him. 'Why?' she asked simply.

'He's piqued my professional interest.'

Sam glowered at him. 'Well, Doctor, I'll leave you to it, then.'

'Where will you go?'

Sam smiled, coyly. 'I've got a date at half-five.'

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. 'Anyone I should warn you about?'

'It's not young Fitz, is it? Fitz Kreiner?' Sam turned to see Roley beaming again, his irritation apparently forgotten.

'Might be,' said Sam, a little embarrassed.

'Oh, he's a pleasant young man, yes. Bit of a sloucher, mind, dodged his National Service. But pleasant enough, yes. I'm looking after his mother here.'

'His mother?' Sam echoed.

'One of my case studies, yes. Strong as an ox - an ageing ox, of course, but even so... Plenty of spirit.'

'Evil spirit?' remarked Sam, raising an eyebrow at the Doctor.

'Perhaps you should avoid the subject,' the Doctor said. Suddenly he grabbed her arm. 'You do realise he's not really from Toulouse?'

'He lives in Archway,' said Roley, a little confused.

'I'll wait for you here,' said the Doctor, abruptly losing interest in the subject. He stared again at Roley. 'It is all right if I stay a while longer, isn't it?'

'Er...'

'There's so much for us to discuss! I mean, your work, your book... Oh, please!' the Doctor implored, like a child asking for sweets.

'Well, why not?' said Roley, a little nervously. 'Don't see the harm. By all means, stay for a while longer.'

'Until my young friend returns, then.' He clapped his hands together, the matter apparently settled. 'Off you go, then, Sam, take your time.'

'Got any dough?'

'If this Fitz is a gentleman, he should treat you.'

'Good tip, Granddad. Very modern.'

The Doctor held her hand briefly, and when he took his own away she was left holding odd-looking notes and coins. 'Nineties girls stand out in the sixties,' he said. 'Be careful.'

Sam sighed, pocketing the cash. 'I will.' She looked at him. 'I don't have to go at all; if you'd just let us leave -'

The Doctor shook his head. 'No. No. Not after what Austen said. Not after what he's seen .'

Sam pouted. 'That stupid cave?'

'The cave, yes. A decidedly odd-looking cave. And I should know: I've seen it myself.'

'Where?'

Sam tried to keep her expression even, despite the chill that ran through her. The Doctor was pointing through the window, at the sky.

2.4

Nurse Bulwell watched Austen as he lay pacified now on the black leather couch in the Restraint Room. That was the official name for it, at least - Charles always referred to the room as Dreamland. He'd never been happy with the thought of something so essentially unpleasant under his roof, although he'd recognised its importance in the right circumstances. 'Give him forty cc's and off to Dreamland with him, Maria,' he'd said, the last time Austen had acted up.

She smiled. Charles was a little too soft sometimes, a trifle indecisive if not taken in hand, but such a good man. She understood him. She understood the effects his childhood boarding in remote public schools had had on his life, how greatly the drive to please an uninterested father had exhausted him with so few rewards. But she'd seen his potential, way back when. She'd understood the dreams that held him in thrall each night; and, while Freud and his teachings enabled Roley to interpret and understand them, Maria knew that only she had the power to make the dreams mean something to him.

She looked again at Austen and pulled hard on the straps of his straitjacket. That this... degenerate was part of his dream irked her a little. Him and all the others downstairs. The preparation for all this had been quite pleasant - the two of them had worked together night after night after night, and she'd sensed how grateful he was. She'd spent the best part of a year just visiting hospitals, trawling through records, listening to his pet theories becoming more and more outlandish and outrageous, and imagining the roads down which they would lead the two of them, hand in hand, into acclaim.

Or into notoriety, even. She didn't fear scandal, she was no stranger to it. She'd lost touch with her friends, dropped them all. How could they compare to Roley? And since she'd moved in with him... Well, the jealous gossips had really dined out on that one! How the rumours must have snowballed through those unsightly streets she'd grown up on. Even her own mother wouldn't talk to her, now.

Her own mother didn't know she'd merely moved into staff quarters, of course, that she slept by herself every night. Roley slept alone upstairs as

he'd done all his life, forlorn and skinny like a half-starved child. But she could give him nourishment. She understood his feelings. She understood him .

Austen stirred very slightly on the couch. She looked at him, balefully.

***

Sam's stomach felt full of butterflies. It was nothing to do with worry about her date: Fitz seemed an all-right bloke, loping along beside her. It was the realisation that she was slap bang in the middle of the London she knew so well but almost twenty years before she was born. So much was familiar, but with subtle little differences; it left her kind of uneasy, but elated at just how exciting all this was.

The bus they had caught, bright red and shiny, was so much like the ones she'd used to catch – only the headlights, round and old-fashioned, gave it away as belonging to the past. In the same way, the ambulance that had taken away the old dear had been a variation on a familiar theme - no back-to-front writing, a stacked roof... And the design was so boxy, so... well, so out of the sixties.

Sam shook her head. Nineties girl. I'm going to stand out if I keep gawping like this. But, for God's sake, there's another TARDIS over there!

'Here we are. Chateau Kreiner.' A long journey with two changes and they were approaching Fitz's home, a convenient ten-minute walk from Archway tube. Sam smiled politely - it was a tiny-looking third-floor flat with grimy windows.

'It's bigger on the inside, honest,' said Fitz, opening the front door and leading her up the stairs. Sam looked wryly to an imaginary camera.

'Here we are, then. Swinging or what?' Fitz said, deadpan.

'It's... great.' Sam looked around at the cluttered interior of the stale-smoke-smelling flat. A brown armchair like the one her gran owned, with a pile of newspapers and half-full ashtrays next to it. A big brown radio - or a wireless, whatever - sat on the mantelpiece. There was no TV, and the carpet was puckered with cigarette bums. An electric guitar was leaning

against a large rubber plant, and a small orange amp sat dutifully beside it.

'Do you play, then?' asked Sam.

'No, it's my mother's.' said Fitz.

'Really? That's cool.'

'Actually, it is mine. Sucker.'

'No, you're the sucker. I was suckering you with my sarcasm.'

'No, you believed me.'

'I did not believe you...'

Sam realised she was following Fitz's gangly form up the squeaking wooden stairs and wondered vaguely if that was wise.

'My room's up here.'

'My life won't be complete until I've seen it.'

Sam looked around the poky attic room. There was a single mattress on the floor, with a miserably thin, brightly-dyed pillow adorning it. The walls had been white, once, she imagined, but now they were beige - partly age, partly fag smoke to judge by the smell of the place. A huge striped flag that Sam didn't recognise smothered the far wall, pinned up below the tiny window angled up at the sky.

'You've travelled, then?' asked Sam, nodding towards the flag.

'Only as far as Brick Lane market for that,' said Fitz.

He was lighting up again . Sam coughed once more, meaningfully, but he ignored her. 'So where is it, then? Somewhere you'd like to go?'

'Somewhere I'd like to go...' Fitz smiled at the thought. 'I don't know what flag it is. The bloke who flogged it to me didn't know either.' He inhaled and smiled, more gently this time. 'I quite like that. But yeah... it's somewhere

out there. Fitz Free State, maybe. I'll get there someday.' He exhaled heavily and looked at her. 'Well, it's got to be better than round here, hasn't it?'

Sam couldn't think of anything to say, and found herself staring at his dismal little bed. Fitz flopped down on to it and looked up at her a little sheepishly. His eyes were a soft grey, nice. Shame about his nose - it was a bit too long, but at least it matched the rest of him. She could see a few patches of stubble he'd missed when shaving. File under 'needs mothering', she thought, idly.

'I'm sorry,' Fitz said. 'You're not supposed to find out I'm a bit of a loser until you're sufficiently intrigued by my mysterious airs.' He sighed. It was getting dark through the tiny window in the roof. '"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars!"' he proclaimed.

Some of us have visited them, mate, thought Sam to herself, noting how he changed the subject.

'How about a little mood music?' he said. 'Put the light on.'

'Oi! You can't order your guests about.'

'Yeah, but you're a girl.'

Sam kicked him lightly in the shins and went over to the switch. A bare light bulb suddenly glowed sleazy red in its socket.

'What are you like!' said Sam, laughing.

'Whoops, that's my... relaxation bulb. Sorry.' As she watched he jumped up, gripped the red bulb and unscrewed it. The light sputtered and went out.

'Watch it! You'll electrocute yourself!' Before she could find the light switch to turn it off, Fitz was grinning at her in the light of a bright white bulb.

'I laugh in the face of danger,' he said. Then he crouched over a funny, old-fashioned record-player diing. The vinyl popped and clicked as the stylus hit it. Sam suddenly had the tiniest flash of how the Doctor must feel when surrounded with primitive technology. No wonder he kept a billion super-

gadgets in his coat pockets.

It felt funny to be away from him through her own choice.

Jazz burst out from the little built-in speaker. Sam noticed a number of other singles poised above the one now playing, ready to clunk into poptastic mono action."This thing your... bag, then?' she asked, a little self-consciously.

Fitz shrugged. 'It's everything to me,' he said simply. "There's a pile of forty-fives over there. Take a look yourself.'

Sam turned away from him and crouched down to do so. "They're all broken! They've got great big holes in them!' she announced.

'Er, it's called "ex-jukebox",' said Fitz, looking at her oddly.' You may be able to afford six and eight, but I prefer paying two and eleven at Easy Mick's.'

'I, er, listen to cassettes, mainly,' mumbled Sam. 'You know, tape thingies...'Then she flushed further. That obviously wasn't the right thing to say either by the way Fitz was staring at her. 'Anyway,' she announced, awkwardly. 'Aren't you meant to be taking me out?'

Fitz nodded, slowly. 'You are all right without your doctor, aren't you?'

***

They got off at Tottenham Court Road, and Sam looked around in the mild evening air. How could somewhere so familiar feel so alien? The Dominion was still here, but its sign was different, duller, less ostentatious. The adverts on the hoardings and on the buses talked of 99 Tea and Swallows raincoats (in the summer? Some things didn't change), as well as old faithfuls' like Wrigley's, Kodak and Gordon's gin. The buildings around all seemed a little less grimy. There was no Virgin Megastore. No Burger King. Ordinary cars were joining buses and black cabs driving along Oxford Street. Jesus, this was -

'Do you not get out much or something?' Fitz seemed just the tiniest bit fed up, probably because every conversation he'd tried to get up and running

since leaving the flat had swiftly tripped up over Sam's one-word replies. She'd felt unsettled ever since they'd approached the West End, and now, standing here, she couldn't help feeling as if she was standing out like a sore thumb.

She glanced around her again. It was almost like being watched.

'I'm sorry. I'm... I'm a bit nervous.' She thought quickly. 'I haven't been to a really big city before. 'What a lie, Sam Jones. She spared a thought for Shoreditch, home sweet home. Hardly hills-and-vales territory.

'Country girl, eh? Knew it; said Fitz. 'Well, I promise tonight will be a night to remember.' He smiled, and leaned against someone's car. The driver hooted at him, and Fitz raised his trilby at him and stood back up. 'Stuck-up moron!' he said through teeth gritted in a broad grin.

Sam smiled too. She'd remember tonight for his dress sense alone. He was still wearing the raincoat that came down to his knees, but under that he was wearing a pair of maroon slacks with raised seams that clung to his bony hips, scuffed old suede loafers and a shirt striped in red, blue and black. 'In the Italian style,' he had announced vaingloriously in response to her teasing.

'You don't care, do you?' she laughed.

'It's how I was brought up,' he said. 'Not to care.' She wasn't sure if he was joking or not. 'Anyway, come on.' He started off down Charing Cross Road. 'A game of pool...'

'You know how to treat a girl.'

'.. .and we'll go on to Molly's'

'A pub?'

'Bit more exclusive than that,' said Fitz. He rubbed his hands.'Didn't I mention I only move in the most exclusive of circles?'

'Sure that doesn't translate as a world of your own?'

Fitz's face fell very slightly, he looked a little more vulnerable. Sam looked at him and smiled to herself as they walked along. He was older than she - about twenty-six, twenty-seven - which would make him forty-four when she was born. Which meant he was in his sixties when she met the Doctor...

What becomes of you, anyway? she wondered. You're just dossing around here, passing time, taking things as they come.You don't know anything about holes in the ozone layer, global warming, recycling. There's no AIDS in your world, no HIV tests, no Femidoms or twelve-packs of Durex. It's all easy, isn't it? None of the guilt and the crap I've had foisted on me since I could talk.

God, I'm being patronising. This is how my mum would act. But look at you, Fitz Kreiner... Imagine if I showed you what music sounds like on CD. Or if we rented a film on video and watched it on a widescreen colour TV. You've got no PC, no Super-Nintendo, no idea of all the rat-race stuff you're missing. Multiplexes, satellite TV, all the naffness of the nineties... No cashpoints, for God's sake. There are no heart transplants in your world, no gene splicing or moon landings, but you've got Cold War and Germany in two halves and You've Never Had It So Good... Christ, this is weird. My past, your present. What am I even doing here?

Sam couldn't lose the sensation of standing out, of being watched. She looked down at the pavement
as she walked.

***

Fitz looked at Sam again, walking along beside him. His gaze flicked down.

Great arse, he thought, happily.

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'Believe me, Doctor, by working with these people, by helping them come to terms with their illness
-'

'Come to terms?'The Doctor raised an eyebrow at Roley. 'Come on. You're

not just hoping some common denominator's going to make itself blindingly obvious through group work, are you?' He shook his head. 'You're pushing them, goading them. Forcing them to face things they can't deal with, and triggering relapses as a result.'

Roley's voice came out wobbly and high-pitched. 'I wasn't aware you'd attended my sessions, Doctor. I rather feel that I am perhaps better acquainted with the personalities of these poor unfortunates than yourself.'

'Fine. Soon sort that out. Let me meet them.'

Roley stared at him, aghast. 'Out of the question.'

'If I'm going to help you, I'm going to have to meet them.'

'Help me? You're being preposterous, man,' cried Roley.

'What are you afraid of?' asked the Doctor, innocently.

'I invite you into my home, I discuss my work with you...'

'And now I'm offering you a second opinion.' He smiled, suddenly. 'It's a very learned one, by the way.'

As Roley opened his mouth to object further, the door was flung open, and a dark-haired woman galloped into the room, tall and lithe. She skidded to a halt on the polished wooden floor of the room by the desk, her long, black, cotton dress flapping around her. She looked up at the Doctor, her eyes hazel and large in her white, round face.

'So sorry, Dr Roley,' the woman said, without appearing to mean it. 'I didn't realise we had a visitor.'

'Ah, Lucy.' Dr Roley took a deep breath, either to calm himself down or to steel himself for dealing with this latest interruption to his work. 'What can I do for you, then, hmm?'

'Or to you,' offered the Doctor.

Roley smiled, thinly. 'Er, this is... Well, easier I think if you just call him the

Doctor, Lucy.'

'Doctor. OK. Hello. Doctor and Doctor.' Lucy giggled.

'Doctor, this is Lucy Branch, one of my, er, guests.'

'Delighted.'

The Doctor bowed slightly, and Lucy grinned. 'Where's your little girlfriend?' she asked, peering at him, stepping closer.

'I thought you said you didn't realise you had visitors?' the Doctor asked.

Lucy grimaced. 'You are a doctor, aren't you?' Her voice became confidential. 'Ever so clever, you doctors.' The playful smile came back as she asked in a stage whisper, 'Are you as dull as he is?'

'The Doctor's friend Samantha has gone out for the evening,' said Roley. He cleared his throat. 'Now, Lucy. This is my private study, you know that. The Doctor and I were discussing many important things and... well, I really don't think you should -'

'I shouldn't interrupt!' cried Lucy, standing on tiptoes. 'I know. It's rude, isn't it?'

There was a short pause, as Lucy made a great show of reflecting on her poor conduct and the Doctor and Roley looked at each other.

'Never mind,' said Roley, clapping his hands together. 'Never mind. So, why did you interrupt us?'

Lucy sighed. 'I suppose I just didn't think, Dr Roley.'

It was the Doctor's turn to clear his throat. 'No, I think he meant, what did you want to say when you came in?'

Lucy dropped like a stone into an armchair. She stretched her long legs out in front of her and tapped her toes together. She looked at the Doctor.'You probably think I'm a bit dizzy, don't you?'The Doctor didn't get a chance to answer. 'We were just wondering where Oscar was, that's all.'

Roley looked at the Doctor and stammered. 'Er... he's not well, Lucy. He's resting.'

'Resting?'

'Resting.' Roley nodded.

'Oh.' Lucy nodded too, seriously. 'Davydd's feeling a bit funny, as well.'

'Davydd?' asked the Doctor.

'Another of my guests,' Roley told him.

'Captain Watson, my lovely Welsh soldier,' said Lucy. 'Yes, he said he was feeling terribly strange.' She stared hard at Roley. "There's something going about.'

'No doubt,' said Roley.

'No doubt at all,' said Lucy, still staring.

3.1
Lucy and the Watcher Angels [1951]

The curtains swelled into the room as the breeze caught them. Lucy felt the rain on her skin and blinked as she considered the whiteness of the sky outside.

She folded her arms across her stomach and turned her head, feeling the solid bulk of the pillow pressing hard against her ear. This was a nasty little room. The beige carpet was threadbare. The wallpaper was busy with roses that had faded from red to a pale pink. That came from having such a large window, she decided. The sun might shine through it for hours at a time, in the summer.

The drizzling sky drew back her eyes. A long crack in the glass glistened in the rain. She knew if she sat up she would see a horizon of drab, mouldering brickwork, slums and warehouses, narrow streets with narrow-minded people crowding them. It was better to stay lying down with only the bright white rectangle filling her view, though the mattress was thin and uncomfortable. The blanket that covered her smelted old, and was the colour of mustard. A clock ticked away the minutes noisily, but she ignored it. The curtains were buffeted again, and the breeze brought more of the fine spray of rain to her face. She smiled and rubbed her stomach.

From that fine rectangle of light a watcher angel had come again last night.

The door of the room opened and the man walked in. His hair was blond, tousled from where he'd been sleeping, pressed up close against her. She'd felt each movement of his body while he'd slept, muscles twitching as the spirits left him, breath coming in the same soft moans that had ended the night and ushered in the next day. It always happened like that.

And, as always, Lucy had not slept.

She didn't need to look at him as he swayed in the doorway in a robe that was too small for him. He was the same as all the others. She heard a match strike and caught a waft of cigarette smoke before the wind blew again, snatching the smell away. She hated the ones who smoked.

'Do you want a cup of tea, love?'

The voice was bored, uninterested. It said, get out of my bed and my room and my life - and she would soon. For now, she just wanted to lie here looking at the whiteness a little longer, so she said simply, 'Yes.'

'"Yes please", you mean.'

Irritation, too. Get out of my place, his voice was saying, this isn't part of things, this is just the kindness of my heart, so say 'Yes, please' and then go. Keep things pleasant. They'll get ugly if you push your luck like this.

'Yes,' she affirmed, holding her breath until she heard the door close behind him and his footsteps retreat to the poky little kitchen the far side of the maisonette.

He was a strange man to have been chosen. Normally they had dark-brown hair, or black like her own. She felt more comfortable with those ones. Blond-hairs seemed more angelic, more innocent, they shouldn't be used for deeds such as this. No one was safe, nowadays.

The wind blew strands of her hair against her face. Rain rattled against the half of the window that was closed, like distant gunfire. She wished she was not at war.

'Son of the morning,' she said out loud, just as she'd said last night to him, looking all the while at his puzzled smile as it spread into a jammy grin. 'Come into me now. Take control of this vessel. I give myself into your hands.'

She spoke the words tentatively, listening to her clear, low voice as if unimpressed by the conviction it carried. 'I give myself into your hands for your service.'

'Not again, darlin', OK?'

She hadn't heard the man return. She frowned and said nothing.

'I've got your tea, but there's no milk.' She heard the mug plonk down on the table by the bed. Come on love, we've bad our fun, that was last night, I

was pissed. Come on, love, drink your tea and get out . Oh, she knew; she'd heard it thought so many times, but she smiled slightly to think that the blond ones were the same as the dark ones.

Bad angels. Come to Earth to enter the spirit of the mortals below. Taking human girls to taste. Choosing her, again and again. They knew her. They could not resist knowing her again and again. They were like flying angel moths to her light, like the big, brilliant white light of the sky.

It needed to be her. She gathered the seed and destroyed it, wiped it out from inside her. She knew she had no choice now. Somewhere out there in the white heavens, eyes were watching her, eyes that knew her. They always ensured she did what was right. She moved her hands over her belly again, as if trying to discern movement inside.

He was hovering, awkwardly. He wanted her out.

'It's freezing in here. Why d'you want the window open?'

'I like to feel near the sky.' Her tone suggested she was amused, but she wasn't sure why she should be. Under the blanket her skin was warm, a breeding ground, damp with sweat. Her face was chilled, wet, desensitised.

She turned to look at him, inquiringly. He didn't meet her gaze, turning instead to his own mug, stirring in sugar with a look of bored determination on his pale face. She didn't care that he wouldn't look at her, but the clanking of the spoon against the porcelain cup irritated her. It was too much noise for such a little room.

Lucy forced herself to relax. There was nothing wrong, after all.The evil was safe inside her. She would kill it, then gather more. The devil made work for idle hands. She was put on Earth to allow those hands rest, just for a night, just long enough to capture their evil. And one day the watcher angels would be spent and their master would come. She would be his vessel, fool him with his own pleasures and then take him away with her to kill.

She felt the blankness of the white sky was a judgement upon her, and took the cold and the rain willingly.

She could almost feel the heat draining from the mug on the table as the man shifted balance from foot to foot, impatient for his own space and privacy.

'Look, love, will you be all right getting home?'

3.2

The smell of someone unalike was in the air. Someone who didn't belong here, who reeked of difference, close by. It was either the young woman, or the tall man. Azoth's senses tingled, the black gap in his memory teased by the scent.

'We'll find them again,' said his friend, Tarr.

'You must be my eyes,' he meant to say, but his voice sounded slurred, broken. Tarr was well used to him, though, and understood the words. 'I will be, Azoth.'

Azoth nodded. He was so old, now. It seemed wrong that he had outlived both his sight and his memory. He shouldn't be able to smell someone different so strongly. It was the young woman, he was becoming certain. And there was something else: she was linked somehow to the half-glimpsed things that had haunted him these last months, since his awakening.

'We must know more.'

'If it makes you happy,' Tarr said, 'then we shall.'

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'Here's everyone, Doctor! Come and join our party!'

Lucy threw open the heavy doors to the dining room and Roley winced as they crashed into the walls.

'Thank you,' said the Doctor, peering inside and noticing the remains of several meals. 'Oh good, you've all finished. I wouldn't want to interrupt you.'

Sitting around the long, oak table were three men and a frail-looking old woman. Nurse Bulwell was watching over them from a chair in the corner, and was the only one to acknowledge his presence.

'I didn't realise you'd still be here,' she said, stiffly rising to her feet. 'We've

got no food for you, I'm afraid.'

'Well, I'm really not all that hungry,' the Doctor said. 'I'll just sit and watch you and Dr Roley.' He glanced round the long table at the people seated there. 'If I may join you, that is?'

The cheek of the man. 'I'm only supervising. We don't eat with... we don't eat here '. Maria checked herself as Charles shifted uncomfortably.

Lucy spoke up, skipping over to her place at the table. 'Shall I introduce you, Doctor? This is Russell, Davydd, Muriel and Peter.' She pointed vaguely to a different person as she gabbled each name and smiled.

The Doctor smiled back. 'Delighted to meet you all.'

He seemed to be, too, thought Maria. He didn't flinch in the slightest as Peter Taylor looked him over, a surly scowl on his face. That a thug like that should be so indulged...

'You a friend of Roley's then?' Taylor asked.

'Dr Roley,' Maria said, unable to help herself.

'You could say I'm a sort of colleague of his, certainly... Peter?'

Lucy nodded approvingly. Taylor sniffed, losing interest already, and got up from his chair without another word. He was a big man, his paunch hanging over his belt, creased shirt barely holding it in. Ignoring Roley, he slouched out of the room.

'Don't mind Peter,' chimed Lucy, grinning broadly. 'He's like that with everyone he doesn't like, and he doesn't like anybody.'

She was a bad one, thought Maria. She wasn't really sick, or even misguided - she was just a little slut. Carrying on even here, or trying to. She'd watched her flirting with Captain Watson each day. The poor soul was too much of a gentleman to dissuade her.

'How are you feeling now, Mr Watson?' the Doctor asked.

'Captain. 'Watson corrected him automatically.

'Forgive me, Captain. I attach a good deal of importance to titles myself. I'm the Doctor. Lucy told me you were feeling a little under the weather.'

Maria watched Watson as he went over to shake the Doctor's hand, though the captain's arm was shaking quite well enough of its own accord. Of them all, this was the man she had most sympathy and a measure of respect for. He was polite, well presented - well, he was a hero, after all; she'd seen his medals. You could understand him going off the rails a bit, after all the Germans had put him through.

'It's passed now, thank you. Pleased to meet you, Doctor...?'

'Yes, that's right.'

Watson shrugged. 'Excuse the arm,' he said. 'War wound.'

'I'm sorry. I bear a few of those myself,' said the Doctor, quietly.

'It's all right, he can still use it,' said Lucy, and she laughed, squirming in her seat. 'In fact, I'll bet there could be times it has positive advantages!'

Watson cleared his throat, apparently embarrassed. The Doctor looked blankly at Lucy and, before Maria could utter a disgusted remark, Roley piped up at last. "The lady over there, Doctor, is young Fitz's mother, Muriel Kreiner.'

The Doctor went over to her and crouched by her side. 'I'm delighted to meet you, Mrs Kreiner. Your son seems virtuous and trustworthy.' He nodded encouragingly as if hoping she would agree, but Mrs Kreiner just smiled, her heavily lined face reluctantly stretching itself over her old bones, her voice reedy and surprisingly low.

'He's a comfort to me, Doctor, a rare comfort. It's not been easy for him, growing up with only me to look after him. But youth, it must have his fling, mustn't it?'

The elderly had always irritated Maria. The way they'd launch into reminiscence at the drop of a hat. Still, the Doctor was nodding, expressing

his interest. 'I suppose his surname -'

'I was young, Doctor, in love.' Mrs Kreiner's smile dropped a little; her watery eyes seemed more distant.

The Doctor squeezed her hand, and his eyes looked like hers. 'Love has little time for consequences, does it?' he said.

'Otto's nationality meant nothing to me. People warned me away, you know, but I wouldn't listen. People are always warning about something, aren't they?'

'Yes,' said Russell Waller.

Maria looked at him, her eyes narrowed. The old dear was harmless enough, although she'd deserved all she'd got being a Kraut-lover. The captain was looking at the floor: he didn't approve, and quite right too. But Russell... She looked in contempt at the lock of hair over his high forehead, styled into a rigid hook by Brylcreem. She could always tell when he was nervous; not through any real familiarity with the man, but through the way he always tugged on the hair as if anxious it would move, betray him, give away his secret. He was always so pathetically overeager, so desperate to insinuate himself into conversations, only to realise he had nothing to say once there. What had he ever experienced outside of institutions all his short life? The old dear rambled on about love, but what could Russell understand about that?

The Doctor spared him a look and a smile, more acknowledgement than the idiot was surely used to. But Mrs Kreiner was still going.

'Fitz should have known his dad for longer...'

There she went, waterworks again. She watched the Doctor offer Mrs Kreiner a handkerchief and squeeze her hand a little uncertainly. The old woman smiled in gratitude. Kindness. Maria's mother had always said it made the world go round. That was why she'd been so keen on having a nurse for a daughter, thinking of all the kindnesses her little girl could bestow upon the world.

Maria looked at Roley, hovering by the doorway. He looked unsettled and

ugly in the thick light of the candles on the table.

She hated it when he looked ugly.

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Sam tried not to grimace as she sipped a gin and tonic that was far stronger than she was. She didn't normally drink, but what the hell -it was a night off as well as a night out. Molly smiled knowingly at her from behind the bar, and Sam wondered how hot it had to get in here before the woman's caked-in-make-up face began to drip on to the polished mahogany of the bar that was clearly her pride and joy. She knew why she was receiving this exceptional treatment - she was Fitz's woman. Against all odds, that counted for something here.

The evening was going well. They'd played pool in a pub down Gardner Street (she'd found herself looking for the 50p slot on the table, then been informed it was three and ten pence ha'penny for each game - how did anyone survive pre-decimal?), been to a pretty reasonable Italian (she'd had a salad - not much in the way of veggie nosh round here) and then on to Molly's as promised, which had turned out to be a small club in the basement of a big brick building down Mercer Street. Sam made a mental note to visit this place in her own time, to see what had become of it. The brickwork was painted black, and was adorned with murals so bright they hurt the eyes -even after a couple of these lethal gins to numb the senses. The floor was like a patio, all concrete paving apart from some wooden floorboards set directly into cement by the look of it. A woman with a high-pitched squeaky voice kept complaining of splinters from them. Put some shoes on, then, thought Sam.

Still, Fitz's playing did make you want to get up and move. He was good, really good: the man playing acoustic guitar on the small makeshift stage was worlds apart from the laconic loafer she'd travelled here with. Molly was still smiling at her watching him. Sam felt a flutter of pride, and chastised herself.

It had all gone a bit weird from the moment they'd entered. Fitz had put on a limp as they'd come into view of the doorman, who had smiled and let them through, offering Sam a large leather volume to sign. Molly herself had greeted him with delight: 'Sweetie! Come to me, darling. Oh, you're a

cup of tea!' And she'd kissed him with chaste enthusiasm. Fitz had worked here as a host, it seemed, amusing the guests and getting them to part with their cash for drinks as often as possible. He'd given it up now, but was still a regular. She'd watched him in action, deftly manipulating old acquaintances and making new ones. She realised he was using the limp for sympathy: the struggling artist with his gammy leg still rising to the occasion to play like this and entertain them all. After tips, no doubt, at the end of this impromptu performance. He was someone else up there, playing and crooning with his eyes closed. He mattered, to this thirty-strong crowd, if only for the moment.

He played guitar in a club, she saved worlds with a friend. Oddly, she imagined that the buzz had to be about the same.

Thinking of the Doctor reminded her of the time - it was later than she'd thought. It felt somehow wrong to be calling him up from a club.

Sam went to the bar and Molly steered her to an alcove with a black Bakelite phone.

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Roley examined his napkin, studiously. Now Maria had gone to bed, he was feeling a little out on a limb. Dinner had been pleasant enough, but in truth Roley was a little afraid of this Doctor. After all, the man had seen Austen - seen the state he'd lapsed into - and thought no doubt that Roley was to blame, an amateur dabbling in things best left alone. Well, so many had said that. If the Doctor wanted to stir up trouble he'd have surely just gone to the police, yet his sudden arrival and interest made Roley uneasy. What if the man were some kind of rival, researching a book of his own?

Roley had checked on Austen himself, earlier. It couldn't be the experiments, surely: Austen hadn't had the treatment for a couple of days, and his last fit had been weeks ago. It was some other influence, he was sure of it, something rising from the race memory. All he had to do was prove its existence, in Austen and in the others.

He glanced worriedly at the Doctor, as if the man could read his thoughts, but still he sat, quite serenely over the remains of hiscroque-monsieur and a glass of brandy. He'd been affable all night, making conversation about

that Russian girl they'd put into space (a personal friend, it seemed) and the American woman who'd written that Silent Spring nonsense. But he'd not been just looking at him and Maria: he'd been watching them. The Doctor's eyes were like stones; in the low light of the room they seemed pure, cold, all colour painstakingly bled from them. The soft words belied the strength of purpose in those eyes.

He turned as the door opened, and Cynthia, the maid, came through. She was a pleasant enough girl, but Roley felt she failed to show him proper respect. His father had appointed her, and he knew the old boy was a hard act to follow, but even so... Even now she was looking at the Doctor, barely acknowledging Roley's presence.

'What is it, Cynthia?' he said.

Cynthia spared him a glance. "The Doctor's friend, Sam.'

'Sam?'The Doctor jumped up as if he'd accidentally been sitting on her. He stared around the dining room. 'Where?'

'She called for you, sir,' said Cynthia, stifling a smile. 'She asked me to tell you she was having a "far-out" time and will be heading back soon.'

'Back here?'The Doctor put his hands in his pockets and stuck out his lower lip, pacing over to Roley's desk. 'She'll be late, won't she?'

'Thank you, Cynthia, that will be all,' said Roley.

As the girl left the room, the Doctor looked a little anxious. 'I'm afraid we're rather imposing on your hospitality, aren't we?'

Roley wanted to nod furiously but his neck seemed to have frozen. 'Well -' he squeaked.

'Can you recommend a good B and B in the area?'

Roley tried again. 'Well, there is -'

'- always here! Of course there is, my dear chap, big old place like this. That's splendid news! Of course we'll stay over.' The Doctor shook Roley's

hand warmly and practically skipped back to his seat. 'You're really too kind, Dr Roley.'

'But -'

'First thing tomorrow we'll be out of your hair.'

'You'll leave?' Roley struggled not to sound too delighted.

'I promise .'Though the Doctor smiled benignly at Roley, those eyes still seemed to stare through him.

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Sam had just slid back into her seat as Fitz came to the end of his composition. He stood up and bowed theatrically. The applause was loud, but Molly's voice still rang out: 'Don't neglect your lady friend, Fitz. Someone as pretty as her shouldn't be left hanging around!'

'You're right, Moll, it's not safe in here. Pour her gins any larger and she could drown in them!" There was good-humoured laughter at their banter.

A man leered at Sam through his chortling, and she gave him what she hoped was a withering look; she couldn't be sure her facial muscles were still responding.

'You heard Mr Fortune,' said Molly. 'My gins are the largest properties off Shaftesbury Avenue.'

'Is that why we need to take out a second mortgage to afford one?' laughed Chortling Man. The doorman glowered at him.

'Mr Fortune ?' asked Sam as Fitz sat down to join her.

'The one, the only, Fitz Fortune - a smile, a wink and a thorough knowledge of the pentatonic scale.'

'So what's wrong with your own surname?'

He smiled thinly. 'I don't advertise being the son of a German if I can help

it.'

Sam considered this. The war, she guessed. 'What do you care what people think? If they've got a problem with that, well, it's their problem, isn't it?'

'It's my problem if they're kicking my head against a wall,' said Fitz, looking at her. 'When were you born? Forty-two? Forty-three?' Sam was relieved he didn't give her a chance to answer. 'War baby at any rate, aren't you? I was almost four when war broke out. Just old enough to appreciate a good kicking for being a Kraut bastard.' He lit up a cigarette and drank from Sam's glass. She didn't object. 'Five years of that teaches you to keep stuff to yourself.'

'But the war stopped ages ago,' said Sam.

'Sure it did. I remember it well.VE day was lovingly commuted into VF day. Victimise Fitz .The kids on my street celebrated by kicking me down the road.' His face softened as he looked at her, apparently realising she was feeling uncomfortable. 'I'm sorry. That was meant to be a joke.'

'Was it?'

Fitz put on a Churchill accent. 'In war, you gets your jollies where you can.'

Chortling Man had swaggered over in time to hear this last comment and gave them both a peace sign. 'Kept quiet about this one, didn't you, Fitz?' he said with a nudge. Fitz made a vague attempt at conspiratorial laughter but Chortling Man failed to notice any lack of sincerity. He leered at Sam again. 'You should be on that stage, not him. Hey, I know you, don't I? You're that club singer, what's her name, Venus someone or other...'

'Sure she is, Chubby. Come on, Sam,' said Fitz, downing her gin for her in one. 'We have to go.'

Chubby put a fleshy hand on Sam's thigh. Without hesitation she slapped him hard round the face. He tottered back in surprise.

Fitz shot her a look. People nearby were staring at them and whispering.

'Poor old Chubby,' he said. 'Seeing stars in every sense tonight, aren't you?' He grabbed Sam by the hand. 'Come on .'

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Watson stood at the window on the landing, staring out into the darkness.

'Not much of a moon, this evening,' he announced. Only then did Lucy emerge from the shadows to join him, looking at the skinny crescent hanging in the sky's blackness.

'When I was young,' she said, 'my father told me the night ate the moon when it was hungry, just a little at a time.'

'I suppose the night spat it out again when it was full, did it?' said Watson, drily.

'Of course. That's why they call it "full moon".' She giggled. 'My father regretted telling me stories like that. My imagination ran away with me.'

Watson looked at Lucy. She brightened this place up, even dressed in her endless black - a summer breeze around all this stuffiness. There'd been something about her that drew him in, right from the start. Suffering, he thought. A kindred spirit. Her wide face was porcelain in the moonlight and quite beautiful.

'Shadows are the same as the night, aren't they?' she said, watching him closely. 'You know, the way they swallow up things. All the comforting, familiar things, I mean.'

Watson looked moodily around the gloomy landing. 'Will you meet me here later?' he said to Lucy. 'Please?'

She arched an eyebrow. 'When?'

'Later. 'Watson walked away. The darkness devoured him too.

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'Fitz, darling, you're going?'

'The night is young and so are we.' Fitz smiled sympathetically at the forlorn Chubby and raised his hat to Molly. 'See you soon, Moll.'

'Oh, sweetheart,' sighed Molly. 'Each time you go through that door I fret I'll never see you again. You simply don't visit me often enough.'

As they walked out, Sam heard Chubby pipe up, 'He can't afford to with your prices!'

Thirty seconds after Sam and Fitz had walked into the hazy night, Chubby made a less dignified exit, rebounding painfully off the railings outside at speed. They heard the fuss he made as he picked himself up, protesting.

'A million stories in the naked city,' said Fitz. He pulled at Sam's hand - apparently anticipating her going to check that the man was OK as he staggered off - and drew back. 'And this one's just
getting going.'

Sam gently pulled her hand away. 'Speaking of which, I should be getting going myself.'

The disappointment on Fitz's face was almost comical to behold. 'Why?'

'Well... The Doctor will be getting worried.'

'Call him up. I've got Roley's number.'

'I already have. Left a message. So he'll be expecting me.'

'And how are you going to afford a cab?'

'With stuff called money. I've got loads, look.' She waved some notes at him.

'And you let me buy the drinks?'

'Didn't want to upset your male ego.'

'So why start now?'

'Look, Fitz, it's been fun but -'

He lunged at her then, mouth open. Sam was so surprised that she was about to gasp, but Fitz's lips met hers before she could make a sound. Suddenly his tongue was in her mouth. It tasted like an alcoholic's ashtray, and she wondered how long they'd actually been snogging before she pushed him away, spluttering.

'You kissed me!' she managed to say.

'Glad you noticed,' said Fitz, in a passable Sean Connery.

'You arrogant... tosser!' Her mind was thick with the booze and with annoyance at herself. She turned and stalked off down the quiet street. 'I'm going home. I'm going to bed.'

'The Doctor's bed, I suppose,' Fitz called after her.

She thought about letting it go, but she couldn't. 'No. Not the Doctor's bed, actually. My bed.' She paused, swaying slightly. 'Not some grotty old lice-ridden mattress on the floor!'

Fitz seemed unabashed. 'Hey, that's cool! I don't mind going to your place!'

Sam set off again in what she hoped was a straight line, back past Molly's and round the corner into what she hoped would be a busy street, but which turned out to be little more than an alleyway. She wavered for a moment before going on. She couldn't go back past Fitz: he'd laugh at her. She wasn't even sure why she was in such a strop with him. He was a cocky sod all right, but -

Five or six strides into the alley she stopped as something moved ahead of her in the gloom.

'Is that you, Chubby?' she said, her voice loud and confident. It bad to be him. 'Well, I'm not some poxy nightclub singer you saw in some dip joint so you can -'

Her confidence was shaken somewhat when Chubby's body was slung

past her, slamming into some dustbins. They made an insane din in the quiet street, but Chubby himself remained silent, his head lolling unnaturally in the sickly glow of the only street lamp.

'You going to let yourself be thrown around all night?' she whispered to Chubby's body. Then a louder voice, harsh and metallic rasped out.

'Venus.'

Sam froze. 'What?'

'Venus .'The 'e' and the's' were elongated to a ridiculous extent. The voice was alien, frightening. A man-sized shape walked slowly into view.

Sam felt slightly foolish as she asked, 'Is that where you're from? Venus?'

'You... Venus*Someoneorother* '.

Another man stepped from out of the thick shadows. 'We want you.'

Why would they call her Venus, unless...? They hadn't been in Molly's, and Chubby wasn't looking too clever. This pair had either beaten the misinformation out of him or else...

She saw the glint of metal on the first figure's head, and shivered at the twisted voice.

'You will come with us, Venus.'

There was no faint mist from his breath in the cool night air when he spoke, and Sam could hear the low hum of machinery. A robot? In 1963? She watched the figure shake as if something was coming out of him.

'It's my night off and I don't give autographs,' she said. 'So if you'll just -'

The two figures advanced on her, walking quickly. Sam tensed herself, then sprang forward.

Patented Fight-or-Flight Plan No. 10, worked out and practised in the safety of the TARDIS months ago. It should've taken these jokers by surprise -

she wasn't running away: she was running straight at them. They should've been caught off guard. But, while one of them took a step backward, unsure, the other simply stretched out his arm and grabbed hold of her shoulder. She shrieked as the pressure of his fingers dug into the skin. Please, not another scar after what I went through getting rid of the last ones...

She struggled to pull free, but now the other guy was here, grabbing her legs, pulling them from under her and she was too off balance to stop him. Oh Jesus, she could hear the machinery more loudly and the Doctor hadn't even let her carry her rape alarm. Too anachronistic, he'd said. Well, bugger that in future because there was going to be -had to be - a future -

She felt something in her mind, something hard like a needle, probing. She flailed about, white noise in her ears, thrashing her limbs wildly, thought of the screaming man earlier that day – and felt something outside respond to that thought...

Then suddenly her head smashed into the concrete; the grip on her body slackened. There was a pause. Her ears were ringing but she could make out scuffles, voices.

'This way, lads, that's right, drag the bleeder down here and we'll sort him. There's ten of us, one of him...'

'And we'll stick anyone in our way, right, boys?'

'Right! 'Ere, what's going on down there? Come on, let's have 'em!'

Someone gave a roar of approval, and Sam felt her attackers moving away, glimpsed them shambling off down the alley. Then she realised her eyes were still closed and fear really kicked in. Her head seemed to be spinning like a tumble dryer and just as noisily, but a part of her realised she was still in trouble.

'Stay back!' she warned, trying to focus as a shadow fell over her. 'Don't even think about -'

'It's all right. It's me.'

'Who?'

Fitz. You can't have forgotten me so soon?'

Sam pushed herself up on her elbows and brought the long, stubbly face into focus. 'Where are your mates?'The ludicrous notion flashed through her buzzing mind that she was glad she hadn't asked that of a nineties boy.

Fitz put on a rough voice: 'We're here,' he said, before switching to another. 'Ready to rumble.'

He put an arm round her to help her up. 'You're trembling,' Sam said.

Fitz nodded with an embarrassed smile. 'Can't believe they fell for it. Quick, before they come back.'

'They've gone now,' said Sam.

'How can you know that?'

Sam didn't know. It must've been a tricky question because her brain abruptly switched off before she could really begin to consider the answer.

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Fitz lunged for Sam as she apparently fainted dead away, but he wasn't quite strong enough to stop her body falling to the concrete again. He looked around, uncertain what to do, then noticed Chubby. 'Come on, you old lush, give me a hand with her. I said -'

Fitz grabbed the man's collar and jumped back as Chubby's head fell back lifelessly as if his neck was weak elastic. He felt for a pulse in the pulverised flesh, found none, felt sick, froze. 'Oh God,' he croaked. 'Jesus, sweet Jesus... That could've been me!'

What could he – what should he do now? Go back to Molly's? No, she wouldn't want to know. What could she do? Give him a drink? Stiff gins for a stiff. Jesus, talk about bad for business. Tell the police? No, how could he? No witnesses. What if they thought he'd done it? He could be stitched up a treat... What if Sam couldn't vouch for him? She could be brain-

damaged, she could be dead. What if they blamed him for that too? Come on, think, no one's about now but it won't stay that way, think...

He looked round desperately at Sam's prone body and wished he could join it - if not in bed, then in oblivion.

3.3

Lucy watched as Watson's dark shape padded across the landing towards her. She jumped lightly off the wide windowsill and gently held his twitching arm.

'You've not been waiting long?' Watson asked, softly. Lucy shook her head.

There was a creaking noise, a floorboard nearby complaining at the pressure being placed upon it. Watson looked over, only half surprised as Russell Waller appeared in the ghostly light in his dressing gown, fingering the thick lock of hair on his forehead. Behind him came Peter Taylor, his large frame clad in a long striped nightshirt, which did nothing to make him seem less threatening.

'How come we're all here?' Russell stared at the others, confused.

'Well, we fancied an evening constitutional,' said Watson, looking at Lucy. 'Didn't we?'

'You lot keeping tabs on me or something?' Taylor asked, gruffly.

Lucy was quite surprised when Russell rounded on the ogre of a man. 'It's just coincidence,' he said, fiercely.

No one spoke, until Russell broke the silence once more. "They're treating Mrs K again,' he muttered, looking at Lucy. 'Aren't they?'

Lucy nodded. 'I think so.'

***

Cynthia liked this Doctor. He was warm and friendly, treated her with a bit of respect, not like old Nurse Bullface. He was a bit of a dish, too.

'How long does it take to travel back from the West End?' the Doctor asked, bouncing lightly on the bed, testing the springs.

'About forty minutes, this time of night,' she mused, looking at the clock on

the mantelpiece in the guest room - it was 11.30 p.m., and the realisation made her yawn. Then she shrugged. 'Something like that. Been a while since I was out on the tiles.' She wondered if she was being too familiar, but he just smiled at her.

'Sam phoned an hour and a half ago,' he said.

'She's probably having a good time, lucky thing.'

'Lucky?' The Doctor sighed. 'If only. I'm rather afraid she's been through a bit of a rough patch lately. Wouldn't surprise me if...' He trailed off, then rubbed his hands together. 'I think I'll look in on Mrs Kreiner, get her son's address from her. Which room is she in?'

'Last one down the corridor, that way,' said Cynthia. 'It's a bit late, though, isn't it?'

'Is it?'The Doctor looked concerned. 'She mentioned earlier she'd be getting a late night...'

Suddenly he was past her and through the door.

Cynthia called after him. 'If she is, that's because Nurse Bulwell is -'

Well. He'd find out.

***

As the Doctor approached Mrs Kreiner's room, he felt his ears begin to throb. Low tones and vibrations, repetitive, spiralling sounds cascading over them, were coming from behind the door.

He knocked. 'Mrs Kreiner?' No reply. 'Mrs Kreiner!'

He heard a clunk from inside the room, then the sound of someone trying to turn a key in the lock. Instinctively he twisted the doorknob and pushed open the door.

The Doctor reeled backward the moment he was inside. The room was awash with disorientating sparks of colour and brightness, sending

shadows lurching around the Spartan interior. The sonics were uncomfortably loud - Bulwell had a pair of tartan earmuffs incongruously on her head, and she moved towards the Doctor at speed, trying to bustle him out.

She got him as far as the doorway. 'Get out, you idiot, you'll ruin it!'

'Ruin it?' The Doctor stared at her, appalled. 'What on Earth do you think you're doing? Don't you realise how dangerous it is to subject a frail woman with a history of mental illness to something as crude as -'

'It's none of your -'

'My business , Nurse Bulwell, encompasses infinitely more than you could imagine.' The Doctor's voice dropped lower. 'Get out of my way.'

***

Watson shut his eyes and took a chance, slipping his hand round Lucy's waist. He felt her freeze under his touch for a moment, then relaxed slightly as she responded, caressing the warm, rough skin of his fingers.

'The old woman. Can you feel it?' he whispered.

Lucy nodded. 'She's coming undone.'

***

The Doctor took a step towards Nurse Bulwell. Resolute, she folded her arms, and was surprised when somehow, in the space of a blink, the Doctor had pushed past her and was back in the room.

He was giving the large reel-to-reel tape player a cursory examination.

'Don't touch that! You might damage something,' she yelled over the din.

With a cold glance at her he left the machine and went to study Mrs Kreiner. The lights played around him and the sounds pulsed and distorted.

***

'Can't you feel it?' demanded Watson of the others.

Russell screwed up his eyes. 'I...'

'Step closer,' hissed Watson.

Lucy grabbed Russell's hand and tugged him nearer. 'Do as he says.'

Russell looked at Taylor, who shrugged. 'Maybe it'll hurt less if we stay together.'

***

The field was smeared with different shades of green, white blobs denoting clusters of flowers. People sat, laughing and full up, around picnic hampers on gingham blankets, while dogs and children played frantic games with balls and sticks. Two boys sailed small toy boats in the washy blue of a pond, and it was all so serene, so goddamned bloody perfect -

Oscar Austen screwed up their world, crumpling the paper up tight into a ball and hurling it at the scrubby grass beneath his feet. Rubbish. Painting peace didn't give it to you. He was pathetic, standing there scrawny and hunched up in the empty garden, tiny wooden paintbrush in his hand. What did he know about happiness in green fields?

He looked up at the sky, and it seemed to tumble in around him, as if someone were able to screw up heaven itself. He felt himself the centre of the event, as the world crushed in on him, no place for him here, outside. The clouds burst over him and he was drenched -

He was sweating, eyes red hot in his cold head. The Restraint Room. No painting perfect worlds, now - they'd sewn up his arms against his body. He'd been bad again, but he'd woken up, now, surely, so why did everything feel so wrong?

Something nibbled at his foot. He kicked out, in revulsion. There were rats, or something like rats, in the room; no, it wasn't a room: he was in the cave again. People were screaming, singing, covered in fat, slithering creatures.

The ceiling was a sky, uncrumpling, and it was becoming yellow. This place stank of sulphur. Crystals sparkled in the white rocks. His mother was there, casting a red shadow. But this was his place, not hers.

The demons crawled over his mother, scuttling about her like bloated crabs. Her lips were thin and cracked as her mouth slowly opened. She'd swallowed a tunnel. It could lead him out of here if only he could understand what she was mouthing at him, if only his arms weren't tied, if this place wasn't beginning to burn, to be consumed by fire and the senseless pain searing through him.

Old Nobodaddy was dark inside him, ripping through his body like a wild beast. His spine was a fishbone lodged in Old Nobodaddy's throat, but something else was wrestling it back. Something that wanted his backbone for a crutch, gathering its strength.

***

Mrs Kreiner lashed out at the Doctor, swearing, clawing for his eyes.

'Don't look at me. Feel me. I am the devil,' she rasped, her voice deep and powerful. She spat at him as he fell backward, and Maria screamed. 'I will burn you in darkness, bone by bone.

'See what you've done?' Maria cried at the Doctor as he scrambled back to his feet. She saw the old woman's eyes were swollen, shrouded in shadow, fixed on her. Her wrinkled, bony chin protruded as she grinned, lips thick with drool, and she held out her wasted arms.

'Come to me.'

***

'I don't want to come to you,' mumbled Taylor, snatching his hand from Lucy's and stumbling away down the corridor.

Russell started to follow him, then noticed how much Lucy was shaking, and paused. A large tear slid down her pale cheek, and she looked up at Watson, who was supporting her.

'This isn't right,' she whimpered. 'I'm scared.'

***

Maria found herself moving towards Mrs Kreiner, who nodded encouragingly and held her arms open wider.

The Doctor turned, kicked the tape machine off its chair and unplugged the light-pattern generator. He left the room in silence and black as pitch.

An earthy chuckle sounded in the dark.

***

Lucy's eyes brimmed with tears. 'It's like I'm full of cold water.'

Russell shook his head and ran off down the corridor without another word, leaving Lucy and Watson frozen behind him like waxworks.

***

The Doctor slammed on the main light and Mrs Kreiner recoiled from the harsh brightness, hissing and spitting. Grabbing hold of Maria's cardigan, he hoisted her back and out of reach of the old woman's flailing arms. Then he advanced on Mrs Kreiner. Her face was pale, her eyes losing some of the swelling.

'Relax,' he said. 'Take yourself back, now, Muriel. It's all right.'

The old woman seemed suddenly confused and looked at him tearfully. The Doctor placed a hand on her forehead, smoothing away the dry furrows in her skin, squeezing her hand and muttering soothingly under his breath.

'You're back,' he breathed. 'Back in your room here. Dinner was delicious tonight, wasn't it?'

'The food is always delicious here,' mumbled Mrs Kreiner, happily. 'And there's always people to talk to. I may stay, mayn't I?'

'Of course. But sleep now. We can talk again tomorrow.'

'You are good, indulging an old woman... You must visit me again.'

'Oh, I shall; the Doctor whispered. 'I promise.'

***

Austen writhed on the leather couch, Old Nobodaddy screaming in fury as the sky became a ceiling again, as empty and dull white as the rest of the room.

***

'I'm sick,' said Lucy. "like me to bed, Davydd, please.'

Watson nodded, and slowly, gently, manhandled her listless form along the corridor.

***

'Charles!' moaned Nurse Bulwell as Roley appeared in the doorway of the room.

'What the deuce is going on?' Roley said, looking like a decorated stick in his nightgown. 'Cynthia came to me scared out of her wits by screaming.'

'Your pathetically primitive hypnotic techniques have triggered a fit in Mrs Kreiner,' stormed the Doctor.

'What? Nonsense, man. She's asleep. Look at her!'

The Doctor seemed about to explode, but Maria cut in. 'It's true, Charles.' She straightened her dress, and when she spoke again it was almost smugly. 'A schizophrenic episode, just like that, if you please.'

'Her usual?'

'Her usual.'

'Crikey Moses,' uttered Roley. 'And now she's sleeping soundly? You didn't give her anything?'

'I was able to pull her mind back to before the fit,' said the Doctor. 'Before your technique did any more lasting damage.'

Roley ignored him, rushing to the bed and examining Mrs Kreiner. 'Pupils aren't dilated... no teeth grinding, not a trace of mania...'

Suddenly the old woman began to speak. "The cave...' she whispered, 'rocks and crystals, sparkling in your eyes even when you shut them... Oh, it's so warm, the sky's like one big sun, bright and yellow...'

'Extraordinary,' breathed Roley. 'It's her dream. Yet listen to the coherency of speech. She's still describing it just like the others.'

'Is she still in the trance?' asked Maria.

'She must be, but there's not a trace of catatonia...' He turned to look at her and gripped her shoulders. 'You know what this means?'

The Doctor grabbed the man's own shoulders and spun him round to face him. 'Tell us, Dr Roley. What do you think this means?'

'It means I'm right.' Roley's eyes were gleaming. 'Really right. These people aren't suffering from some straightforward schizophrenia: it's something else.'

'Go on,' said the Doctor.

'It's as if they're suffering from some kind of Tourette's syndrome -wildness, violence, dark thoughts... A disturbance in the very oldest parts of the brain, Doctor, the hypothalamus, the limbics...'

'Spare me the lecture,' interrupted the Doctor. 'Your theory?'

'The excitor transmitters in the brain have been stirred up, altering the personality of each of the subjects, bringing about this delusion. A shared delusion. Don't you see, man? These people's minds are different from the norm: they're "wired" in a different fashion. Something, some common

event in these people's lives, has resulted in a neuronic pathway resolving itself into some sliver of man's racial unconscious!' Roley noticed Maria was nodding with fierce loyalty, although her face was blank, and sighed. "Those affected interpret their journey along that path as a walk through a cave. Now, imagine if we could tap into it further!'

Maria joined in, apparently now on surer ground. 'Find the event that triggered it all -'

'- through hypnotic assault and regression therapy?' the Doctor mooted.

She tried again. 'Find that event and the breakthrough is made.'

'We'll be able to chart specifics in the great unknown of the collective unconscious,' said Roley. 'Can you imagine it?'

'Oh, I think so. But I think the question is, should we?'

'We'll learn again what has shaped us as we've evolved, learn what it is that makes us men.'

'Or learn what it is we've made ourselves forget in order to stay men,' countered the Doctor, his voice rising.

Maria simply smiled, demurely. 'Charles Roley will be a bigger name than Freud.'

The Doctor stared at them both, shaking his head almost imperceptibly, his expression impossible to read. Then he glanced down at Mrs Kreiner, who had stopped her murmuring and seemed to be sleeping peacefully. From time to time, her right arm would twitch, as if being tugged by an invisible thread.

'I think you're wrong,' said the Doctor.

'What do you mean?' said Bulwell, affronted.

'I mean I don't think you're right.'

'Don't be obtuse, Doctor,' said Roley, irritated.

'You believe nature has left these poor souls with the key to the door that we've slammed on our unconscious?' said the Doctor. 'That some chance event affected all of them and pushed them through that door? That they've tried to rationalise that event as being taken into some sort of cave?'

'That's it exactly.'

'Is it, Dr Roley?'The Doctor sat softly on the bed by Mrs Kreiner's side. 'Suppose, as I do, that that cave is real, that it exists.'

'Nonsense,' sneered Bulwell.

'Just suppose . If the cave actually exists, it follows that the affliction your guests share could've been induced, or stirred up, deliberately.'

'By what?' asked Roley.

'By whatever was in that cave,' said the Doctor.

3.4

Sam had recovered consciousness a couple of times in the cab, but she hadn't made much sense. The driver had believed Fitz's story about her having one too many - why wouldn't he? No, no one suspected a thing. He'd wait and see how much Sam remembered, then sort out what his next plan of action would be.

His mind raced with the possibilities. 'Act bloody two!' he muttered to himself. Fitz looked at Sam, dishevelled in her grimy dress beside him. 'Are you going to turn out to be the best thing to happen to me, or the worst?' he muttered. Then he sighed. 'Whatever. Let's face it, you're the only thing to happen to me.'

'Here y'are, mate,' said the cabby, loud and cheerful.

Fitz jumped. 'Right, mate. Thanks.'

The cabbie chuckled. 'Put yer lady friend to bed and give her a couple of raw egg yolks in the morning. Works every time.'

Fitz looked again at Sam. Put her to bed... If only things had turned out differently! If he hadn't tried to kiss her she wouldn't have gone off like that, wouldn't have...

He smiled wearily at the cabby. 'Good advice. Thanks.'

***

Roley was struggling to keep up with the Doctor as he marched along the landing to the staircase and took the stairs three at a time.

'Doctor, where are you going?'

'I need information,' the Doctor informed him without turning round, 'hi particular the Kreiners' address so I can check Sam's all right. I am therefore going to your study to peruse the files on your guests.'

'You most certainly are not,' said Roley, his voice going squeaky as it

always did when he was indignant. 'You have no right to do so.'

At that, the Doctor did turn to face him, his eyes furious. 'On the subject of rights, Dr Roley, I fear you may be treading on very thin ice.'

'And you yourself, Doctor,' Roley said. 'You are a guest in my house and yet you act as if you have the run of the place.'

'I'll settle for the brisk walk of the place,' said the Doctor, walking off again, briskly. 'You're viewing your guests as objects, as things... They're human beings, Dr Roley, not pet people for pet theories.'

Roley dashed on after his wayward guest. 'You wrong me, Doctor. My theories may appear a trifle extreme to the uninformed.

Again, the Doctor abruptly stopped and turned to his flustered pursuer. 'What's it for, Dr Roley? What's all this really about?'

Roley felt himself deflating, as he always used to when confronted by his father. This Doctor looked younger than be was, but the authority his voice carried, the demanding tone... Roley felt weak and self-conscious as he answered. "Think of the possible gains to our understanding of the mind. Imagine if we could ascertain the way the neurons and dendrites have been rerouted in these people. Imagine if we could harness the positive features of manias: heightened awareness, strength, instinct... Think of the new potential we could unleash in the mentally afflicted! Imagine the possibilities if we could control, channel, make sense of the fundamentally senseless...'

The Doctor smiled thinly. 'The ancient Greeks believed that madness was due to the actions of the gods in taking away the mind.'

Roley nodded, enthusiastically. 'Plato thought mental disorder was a sign from the gods, that the afflicted person was being punished for some kind of wrongdoing.' He leaned closer, confidentially, still a little out of breath. 'We could cheat the gods, Doctor. Set their prisoners free.'

The Doctor looked at him. levelly. 'And can you cheat the devils too, Dr Roley?'

The Doctor turned and strode off again. Just as he passed the telephone on its ornamental table, it rang, and he snatched up the receiver. 'Charles Roley is unavailable at present,' he said politely, 'as he is chasing argumentative guests around his house. Please call -' He broke off, to Roley's obvious relief. 'Fitz? Where's Sam? Sam , Sam, Sam, where is she?' His face fell. 'She's what ? How did it...? What were you...?'Then it darkened. 'You did what ?

***

'I put her to bed,' Fitz repeated, as casually as possible. ‘She's sleeping now.'

Jesus, what a night this was. Fitz's heart was racing. If he hadn't been so bloody scared, it would've been great back then, being so flash with the cabby's tip. Sam was minted! He could do with a bit of that. He considered pinching her wad - he'd be able to blame its going missing on her attackers, no problem...

The Doctor's concerned voice on the other end of the phone crackled across his thoughts and he struggled for a reply. 'Er, no, she specifically said no hospitals...' Fitz lied, blithely. 'It's just a bump on the head. You should see what they did to me! Had to fight like a... no. No, no police either.' He decided not to mention Chubby, the look on his face, his neck...

He forced himself to concentrate on the Doctor's voice. 'Yeah... No, her staying over's not a problem, really... No, look, I'll take her with me on my way to work, eight-thirty... Look, honestly, it's not a problem... All right, then. Bye.'

He rubbed his eyes, breathed deeply, leaned against the filthy glass of the phone box. Then a saintly vision of Sam in her bra and pants took shape in his head.

No. Sam's staying over, at least, wasn't a problem...

***

'Muggers, you say?' asked Roley, concerned.

'Ruffians. Thieves. Cowards. Poor Sam. 'The Doctor sighed, heavily.

'Oh... Well...' said Roley, trying to think of something to say. 'Uninterrupted sleep's probably the best medicine,' he concluded. The Doctor said nothing, still deep in thought. 'Speaking of which...' Roley added, heavily, glancing at a grandfather clock.

The Doctor smiled sweetly. 'Please, don't let me detain you.'

'You won't be needing to look at Mrs Kreiner's file now, after all, will you, Doctor?'

'I suppose not,' the Doctor concurred.

'Ah, and here's Cynthia, to light you to bed.'

Roley watched the Doctor trudge up the stairs after the maid. Then he headed for his office.

He'd lock the door. Just in case.

***

Maria wrestled with the bolts on the Restraint Room door. Wretched Doctor, making her feel her care for these people was inadequate. They were the inadequates. No good looking to Charles for support - he'd just stammered a bit before following the Doctor downstairs.

The bolts slid away. She'd barely opened the door before she was stifling a gasp.

Austen lay twitching on the floor. The amount of paraldehyde he'd taken should've left him out cold till the morning. What was going on?

His eyes snapped open and he looked at her, pleadingly.

Suddenly scared and not understanding quite why, Maria turned and left, slamming the door and bolting it shut behind her.

She moved along the corridor and into the west wing. She could call in on

Charles, tell him. Talk to him. They never talked as much as she wanted them to, but with this latest breakthrough... well, he'd seemed so elated. This could be the turning point for the two of them.

She checked her appearance in a large framed mirror, tried to spruce up her hair. But Austen's eyes haunted her memory, his face taking her attention from her own image in the glass. She shut her eyes and cursed him. Then, composing herself, she continued down towards Charles's bedroom.

She found herself trembling as she reached out to the door.

'Don't be so foolish, woman,' she chided herself. 'You're his friend. He'll be delighted to see
you.'

She looked down again at her dress, wishing it were less crumpled. It was late. Perhaps she should've got undressed for bed first, come down in her robe. That might distract him. Lord knew, he was always so tense, so pent up. If only he'd let her, she could do so much for him. Anything he wanted, she thought, blushing.

Her hand clenched into a fist ready to knock on the door. She breathed deeply, summoning her courage.

She knocked, hesitantly - then heard his footsteps coming up the stairs. He wasn't even in his room. She felt her blush deepening; she couldn't see him like this.

Maria ran like a mad thing away from Roley's door before he could spot her. She spent most of the night awake and listless.

***

The Doctor waited two hours before making his move, slipping silently through the shadows of the house. Just as he crossed the hall, a clock bonged noisily, and he shushed it indignantly before moving on.

Roley's office door was locked, but it didn't stay that way for long. Placing the hairpin back in his pocket, the Doctor slowly opened the door. The

creaking as it opened seemed amplified in the quiet darkness, but nothing stirred.

Seconds later the Doctor was rifling through the files. 'What am I doing?' he asked aloud. 'I can take them to my room and read them in peace. Return them in the morning.'

Nothing in the room seemed to object to his plan, so he nodded happily and, after bundling the files under his arm, went back to his room.

***

Russell Waller shivered in his bed at every tiny sound carrying through the dark, tugging on his forelock of hair, his skin damp with perspiration. He felt that something was walking up and down past his door, waiting for him to fall asleep before slowly turning the door handle and walking in. He wanted to crawl into somewhere small and dark, and hide.

As the night wore on, he became convinced there were four or five of the things out there, poised to take him.

3.5

Morning light spread itself thinly round the Doctor's room, and revealed him hunched up in bed, fully clothed, pondering the sheets of paper littered around him.

Abruptly, he scrambled out of the covers and leapt to his feet, the papers seeming to gather themselves more neatly in his slipstream. He flicked through them once more as he stacked them together.

'You kept quiet about all this, now, didn't you, Dr Roley?' he muttered, crossing to the door. A floorboard creaked loudly as if protesting its owner's innocence. The Doctor rutted and opened the door silently, tiptoeing off back downstairs.

A clock struck six.

***

'Where am I?' muttered Sam.

In the seconds that followed she chastised herself for uttering those words - that had to be the single most unoriginal phrase possible for someone recovering from unconsciousness. She could've said, 'Anyone get the number of that Dalek?' or 'is the world dancing to the beat in my head or am I just concussed?' or...

No one had answered the question, anyway, regardless of its merit. She could see a pale, blurry expanse of ceiling - no, it had to be a wall: she was lying on her side. A cell? Clues, clues... She moved her head a fraction, but her vision lurched as she did so. She waited for the feeling to pass. 'What the hell was I -'

Suddenly, a low rumble sounded behind her, and she froze. It was a ghastly sound, unearthly, inhuman.

She realised it was something snoring.

'Oh my God,' she whispered, and, remembering she had arms and hands,

used them to ascertain she was naked except for her undies. She was lying on something too soft to be a floor but surely not soft enough to be a bed...with someone else (arms and hands again)...someone snoring and stark-bollock- naked beside her -

She turned and found a man breathing all over her on this scuzzy mattress in this scuzzy bedroom and...

'Fitz! What's going on here, you - '

Sam sat bolt upright, screamed out the words, then collapsed back in agony. Her head seemed to be telling her in no uncertain terms that if she wasn't quiet it would simply have to turn itself off again. The outburst did have some effect on her bedfellow, however: with a yell of alarm and panic, he jumped out from the blanket as if propelled by an unseen force and scuttled over to the wall before realising where he was.

'Jesus, Sam...' he began, rubbing a hand over his bleary eyes. 'What the hell do you think you're doing? It's barely six o'clock.'

Sam breathed deeply, her fingers gripping the threadbare blanket. 'What am I doing? What am I doing? You get me out of my skull, get me into bed, and -' She stopped, clutching her head again.

'Don't you remember?' asked Fitz, softly. He covered his modesty by placing a small plant between his legs.

Sam barely heard him. Suddenly she was back in the alley, the metal man with the weird voice and his Mend advancing silently towards her like mime artists, the struggle, Chubby, all of it... Then confused memories of someone rifling through her mind as if it were a clothes stall at a jumble sale. And Fitz.

'Back outside Molly's. You helped me,' Sam said.

'I suppose you could say I saved your life, yeah...' He'd lit a cigarette while fragments of last night's experiences were dragging themselves past her throbbing eyes. The smell of the smoke reminded her she had a stomach, one that seemed particularly adept at turning.

'It's all right,' he added, exhaling. 'You already thanked me last night.'

'What?' asked Sam, quietly.

'Grr,' said Fitz, looking coyly at the plant between his legs. 'You were an animal.'

'I was a what ?' asked Sam, wide eyes large with horror.

Fitz slid further down the wall he was leaning against. 'It was beautiful, Sam, really beautiful...'

'But I wouldn't... I mean, I'm not that kind of... How could I...?' Sam rocked her head from side to side. With him ?

Fitz slithered back towards the mattress, looking up at her from under his eyebrows. 'Don't suppose you feel like thanking me again, do you?'

'Don't touch me!' cried Sam, scrambling woozily out of bed as he crawled in the other side, dragging the blanket with her. She turned and looked at him, and realised she'd rather have the blanket covering him up than herself. 'You're a lying bastard, Fitz Kreiner!' she said, flinging the fabric at him. 'How could you?'

Fitz protested. 'What? I think you'll find I did save your life...'

'Yeah, you did, and thanks for that, but does that give you the right to take advantage of me while I'm bloody unconscious?'

'I just took off your gear and put you to bed.'

Sam shuddered, found her dress and started putting it on.

'Not like I wanted a medal or anything,' Fitz grumbled.

'What are you playing at?' Sam cried, realising she was putting the dress on back to front and struggling to rearrange herself without showing Fitz anything else. 'I mean, that man, Chubby... Did you put him to bed in his Y-fronts? Will I find him downstairs?'

Fitz looked away. 'He's dead,' he said. 'They killed him.'

Sam stopped struggling with the dress, and stared at him.

'I mean, you were out cold, he was dead, no one was about. What was I meant to do?' His voice was higher-pitched, his hands cradling his knees through the blanket. 'It's not the sort of thing that tends to happen to me on the average Friday night...'

Sam looked down at the floor. 'I'm probably a jinx,' she said. She breathed deeply. 'So, have you called the police?'

'No way! How was I gonna explain that one?'

'Well, they'll have found him by now, they must've done.'

Fitz settled back down under the blanket. 'What, by six in the morning? Doubt it.' He looked at her, and took another drag. 'Anyway. I'm not getting involved.'

'Bit late for that, isn't it?' said Sam.

'Nothing to do with me.'

'Oh, and I suppose I'm nothing to do with you, either, is that it?' Sam asked him. 'Just someone you were trying to shag five minutes ago.'

Fitz sat up, and his blue eyes were suddenly piercing. 'What is it with you? I mean, there you are, barely out of your teens and yet...'

Sam looked down at herself - dress askew, one arm tucked under the fabric - and then looked back at him a little self-consciously. 'What?'

He slowly shook his head. 'I don't know. It's just that... Well, none of this really shocks you, does it? You're more upset by me making a pass at you than anything else.'

'You don't know what you're talking about.'

'Maybe, maybe not. I don't know. But there's something you're not telling

me, isn't there?'

Sam suddenly wondered why she was feeling on the defensive. Is there?' she said, manoeuvring the dress round again, revealing nothing.

'You know there is - don't kid a kidder. I've been hiding more things about myself than you could -'

'Including any stray morals or principles?' flashed Sam, straightening herself down.

'Yeah, well... So what are you about, then, Miss High and Mighty Sam the Jinx?"

'Why should I tell you anything at all, you pervert?'

Fitz ignored her. 'You try to come over all hip, don't you, so cool... But I'll bet you couldn't tell Arthur and Raymond from John Smith and the Common Men.'

Sam looked around for her shoes.

'Well?' Fitz challenged.

'Enjoy hiding yourself away, Fitz,' she said, with a tight smile. 'Keeping yourself to yourself, not getting involved. Enjoy your nights alone in this dump, wondering what living might actually be like.'

Fitz blew smoke at her as she tripped over her bag, grabbed it, and headed for the door. 'Well, if last night was your idea of living, you're welcome to it; he retorted.

Sam staggered down the wooden stairs, leaning heavily on the banisters now she was out of sight. Her idea of living? She rubbed her aching head, felt her bruised body protesting as it carried her weight, and decided that hiding in an attic room may have some merits as a design for life after all.

***

Fitz angrily stubbed out his cigarette in an ancient cup of tea at the side of the bed, splashing his fingers. He sucked them dean as he thought of Sam. Cheeky cow. How dare she stand there in his own room, preaching at him? Telling him how crap he was, how stunted his life had become?

He sighed. Then again, wasn't that what he tended to do to himself, most nights?

But this wasn't night, he reminded himself. It was barely even morning, for Christ's sake. Now he was left alone to see what would happen next. She'd gone. He'd blown it. Again.

He slumped back down on the mattress and closed his eyes, more despairing now than sleepy.

***

The Doctor had dropped off the files back in the office. He'd left a marmalade stain on one of the papers, somehow, and was ruminating on how that could've happened when he arrived at his chosen destination: the Restraint Room.

He unbolted the door and stepped through.

***

Lucy lay awake considering the way the window dissected the blank sky with its latticework of lead between the panes. Cloudless, featureless, outside was just dull and white, as if a sheet had been pulled over the glass. There was no chance of changing things, of making a new sky, when it looked like this.

If only she could really do it, change the sky, change heaven's mind. The world would see that, as the architect of the new sky, she deserved a place in the world. No one would make her do things anymore. They'd allow for her, talk to her, like her. Maybe someone would even fall in love with her.

She could make them fall in love with her. If she could do that to the sky, she could do anything, couldn't she?

She rubbed her stomach. She felt lonely, now, and the feeling seemed concentrated there. Last night, she'd felt something like... Friendship wasn't the word. Fellowship, perhaps. Davydd liked her, wanted her, she was sure of it. If only she could be sure he was the master here. She was being careful, she had to be; she hadn't asked for more when he'd dropped her on the bed last night, fully clothed. She'd felt weak, sick, unprepared. She had to be at her best when the time came. One more - him, and him alone - and she could rest, she could live under the new sky and be released.

Right now, she felt that the knot of pain and tension in her stomach was a stitch that fixed her, sewn to the bed, unable to move and scrutinised by the white eye of morning.

***

Sam walked as far as Highgate, her head throbbing. She kept looking around, afraid she was being followed. It was a stupid fear, irrational, like a child's. Sam had always been scared of sharks as a child, when she'd seen Jaws 2 on telly as a kid. She'd had this mad fear that a shark would get under her duvet and bite off her legs, and was terrified every night for weeks when the light went out and she was alone with her imagination. Never mind that sharks couldn't live out of water. Never mind that it would have had to negotiate the stairs to get to her. The fear was real even if the threat wasn't, and that was how it felt now.

There was no one about. The streets were silent. Her headache was worse and she was afraid. It practically made her shake... A fear so basic, primordial-

Race memory

Sam froze, remembered what Roley had been saying back at the house to her and the Doctor.

She looked around again. Still the streets were silent.

***

The Doctor moved cautiously towards Austen's prone figure on the leather

couch.

'Hello, Mr Austen!' he said brightly, but to no response. 'It's going to be a lovely morning, by the look of it.' He winced - somehow he doubted Austen would be going outside to appreciate it. 'Apart from some rain, probably,' he added, hastily, 'hi fact, we're far better off indoors.'

Deciding to stay silent now, the Doctor bent over Austen's body, tugging experimentally at the man's straitjacket. 'Hmm.' He rubbed a finger over the skin at the nape of Austen's neck, then began to undo the buckles holding the arms in place.' Just going to take a quick look,' he muttered. 'Have you tucked back in before you know it.'

With the jacket loosened a little, the Doctor peered at the back of the man's right shoulder. There was a scar about an inch or so long there, white and puckered.

The Doctor reached out to touch it.

The scream made him jump away. Austen spun round to face him, wide-eyed and terrified, as if it hadn't been he who'd made the noise at all.

The Doctor held out his hands in a reassuring gesture. 'It's all right, don't worry, I won't -'

- get to finish my sentence, thought the Doctor, wryly, as Austen propelled his body forward and shoulder-charged him. The Doctor staggered back into the wall, noting that the room was soundproofed and that no one would be alerted to the disturbance. Nimbly, he dropped to the ground and rolled over and over, his velvet coat-tails spinning like rotor blades, his body tripping up Austen, who pitched face down on to the floor.

In a moment, the Doctor was up on his feet and at the door. It was stuck fast and wouldn't open. Then he realised that someone must have bolted it from the outside.

There was a low, ripping noise, of stitching being pulled apart.The Doctor turned to find Austen had torn his arms free of the straitjacket and was advancing towards him.

***

Sam had found a cab on the Great North Road and was idly rubbing a finger against the beige leather upholstery as the disquieting familiarity of a London that was not quite her own sped past. She felt sick and miserable. The first thing she'd do was tell the Doctor they had to leave. If he wouldn't go with her, she'd wait in the TARDIS for him by herself. She'd had enough of -

The fear rose in her like bile, and her head pounded. She felt her eyes bulge, and dug her nails into the seat so hard that the leather split.

***

The Doctor banged on the door. 'Hey!' There was no time for anything else before Austen was on him. The Doctor grappled with him.

Austen's eyes were fierce, red-rimmed and bloodshot, and his face was twisted with fury. 'I... am... in hell .' he spat, throwing the Doctor bodily across the room.

The Time Lord landed awkwardly against the couch, righted himself and backed away. 'I know. I know. But I can help you, Mr Austen, I'm sure I can -'

'I can see them on you.' Austen sounded afraid. 'Death is all over you, even in here.'

'Where are we?' asked the Doctor, sharply. "The cave?'

Austen nodded, then lurched towards the Doctor again. 'False demons,' he drooled. 'You're covered in them.'

'Old Nobodaddy!' cried the Doctor. "That's who you think is controlling you, isn't it? But it's not him, it's not!'Austen lunged for him but the Doctor slipped under his arms. He tried the door again but still it wouldn't budge. 'You were eight when he first came to you, weren't you?'

Austen stood still, swaying. 'My mam gave me to him,' he said, his voice incongruously soft. 'She was sick, and she made me sick too. On purpose.'

'No! That's just what he tells you. I know he makes you hurt people. Makes you do things when he wakes up. But he's not controlling you, he's not -'

Austen shook his head and hissed, 'Don't tell me he's not real. He can hurt you, bad. Don't you dare tell me he's not real.'

The Doctor shook his head in time with him. 'I'm not telling you that. He's real to you, I know, and you're both being controlled by something here .'

Austen looked at him suspiciously. 'Here?'

'The cave!' the Doctor said, waving his arms expansively. "The yellow light, the glittering rocks...'

Austen looked as though he was about to cry. 'He took me here. Did things to me. Years ago.'

The Doctor took a cautious step towards him, his hooded eyes narrowed in thought. 'Hundreds of years ago, Mr Austen?'

Austen grabbed the Doctor's hair and yanked him closer. Austen's dead in hell. I chewed him up and made him gristle like I did his old mam.' Austen's voice was barely recognisable as he shrieked, 'That's why I'm Old Nobodaddy!'

The Doctor pulled on the man's arm but couldn't loosen his grip. 'Look at your hands,' he gasped. 'You're an artist, man, an accomplished one!' Austen tugged harder on the Doctor's hair, threatening to rip it out. 'It was your wish to capture the world on paper that brought you back outside into it, wasn't it? Don't throw that away!'

Austen wasn't listening. The Doctor tried to stare him down, hoping to hypnotise him in some way, but the man's eyes were glassy, rolling. Austen's free hand was beating him across the shoulders, heavy blows that practically pummelled the Time Lord into the floor.

Austen spoke breathlessly, grinding out the words as he released the Doctor's hair in order to hit him with both fists. "They love you... They suckle on you... When you're with us in hell, Old Nobodaddy'll open your

veins and bleed you dry... Alien filth!'

In desperation, the Doctor pushed through Austen's legs on his hands and knees. With an angry shout, the man toppled over on to the floor.

The Doctor turned and slumped back against the wall. 'Don't stop there,' he panted, rubbing blood from his split lip. "That was just getting interesting.' He scrutinised the fallen man, who was almost sobbing with emotion - whether rage or sorrow the Doctor couldn't tell. 'Filth such as myself always appreciates the correct designation. What do you mean, alien?'

Austen shook his head, bellowed incoherently and scrambled towards the Doctor again, grabbing for his throat.

***

Sam felt the world pitch and spin around her though the car must’ve stopped. The driver was angry, staring at her, telling her if she was going to be sick to do it outside the cab. She couldn't say anything.

***

Before Austen could reach the Doctor - who had curled himself into a ball for protection - the door swung open. It caught Austen heavily in the ribs and knocked him aside.

The Doctor watched as Nurse Bulwell hurried through the door and plunged a large hypodermic into the man's rump. Austen screamed, and pounded his fists against the floor like a child in a tantrum, swearing to kill them all, until his anger subsided into whimperings and at last he lay still.

The Doctor heaved himself up and went to inspect Austen's prone body. 'What was that? More paraldehyde?'

Nurse Bulwell looked at the Doctor, grimly. 'A lot more. And what do you think you're doing, then?'

'Checking something.' He prodded around the scar on Austen's shoulder. 'Well, well...'

'What? What are you doing here, anyway?'

The Doctor got up and shrugged, and winced at the pain the movement caused him. 'Couldn't sleep. Decided to make myself a cup of tea and thought he might want one.'

'Had you not noticed how dangerous he can be?'

The Doctor looked at her suspiciously. 'I'd not noticed how that door could lock itself from the outside.'

'It wasn't,' said Bulwell. 'I was passing, heard the disturbance, and locked the door while I went to fetch this.' She tapped the glass syringe.

The Doctor cocked his head as he looked at her. 'This room is sound-proofed. You must've been right outside when...'

She looked at him, untroubled. 'Couldn't sleep myself. Wondered what you were up to, traipsing round the house at this hour.'

The Doctor's stare was as hard as his voice was soft. 'I could've been killed.'

'Would you rather I'd risked him roaming all over the house?' Bulwell said, lightly.

'Of course,' agreed the Doctor. 'He could've damaged some ornaments. Made a terrible mess.'

Lifting Austen gently on to the couch, the Doctor left the Restraint Room without another word.

'And where are you going now?' Bulwell demanded.

'To see Roley. There's something he should know.' He spun on his heel and faced her. 'Coming?'

3.6

Tarr awoke to find Azoth's blank metal visage hovering above him. He did not start. Azoth was his friend. They looked after each other. Azoth was probably just watching him to make sure he'd absorbed all the learnings without ill effect.

'I felt something," said Azoth. 'Something was triggered in me.' He paused. 'We need more knowledge from Sam.'

It sounded more like 'Zaaaaam' the way Azoth said it, but Tarr knew what he meant. 'Or the man who was with her.'

'Sam is different.'

'I know, "she doesn't belong".' He got up from the metal couch. He felt fine, if a little light-headed. Edward Anthony Withers had had some interesting learnings, and the taste, the breathy beginnings of Samantha Angeline Jones's thoughts were truly remarkable... A lot of them didn't make any sense but Tarr was sure that would change when they had her whole head and not just a little bit.

He smiled, cheerily. 'I'll go out looking right away.'

Azoth barely got out four sentences in the minutes it took Tarr to put on his clothes: 'We could search for weeks. She will go. She does not belong. She knows what we seek.'

Tarr was very patient as he listened. He knew how aggrieved poor Azoth was now that he had such trouble talking. 'I'll just keep looking for that area we saw in her head.'

'Your kind...'

Tarr beamed in childlike delight."Thank you, Azoth!'

'Your kind are mistaken so often.'

Tarr pouted as he put on his shoes. 'Everyone makes mistakes.'

'Venus was Sam. A stupid mistake. Your kind arc wrong too often and die too easily.' Immobile like a tailor's dummy, Azoth made a peculiar sight, draped in the ill-fitting clothes Tarr had stolen for him.

Tarr sighed. 'Look, we'll take more learnings if we have to. We will find it. I'm going off now to search extra hard.'

Still Azoth said nothing. Tarr didn't know whether he was sulking or whether he had stopped working again. He pulled on his heavy, dark blue overcoat and the huge metal doors in front of him slid open to reveal the dark, dank tunnel that led outside.

With a final worried glance at Azoth, Tarr set off.

***

'You're up early, Doctor.'

'Aren't I?'The Doctor breezed in, sat next to Roley at the breakfast table and lifted the man's fried breakfast out of reach. Roley protested, just as Maria stalked through the door after the Doctor. Roley watched as the Doctor thrust the plate upon her. 'Breakfast later, Dr Roley. What about the cysts?'

Roley looked aggrieved, and pawed his ruffled hair in consternation. 'Really, Doctor, you're a law unto yourself. May I remind you once again you're on my property and as such I -'

The Doctor slammed his hand down hard on the table, silencing him. 'What about the cysts?' he repeated, slowly.

'What are you talking about?' said Roley, swapping annoyed glances with Maria.

'"Strange, cyst like deposits lodged around the shoulder blade removed from each patient," to quote your own notes, Dr Roley.'

'How dare you read his private papers?' stormed Maria, but Roley waved a placating hand at her.

'I'll deal with this, Maria.' He noticed her flush, then turned back to the Doctor.

'You considered them to be some kind of somatoform disorder, apparently,' said the Doctor.

'I still do. Simple psychological upsets manifesting themselves as physical symptoms.'

'Generating organic deposits such as that? Poppycock.'

'You are entitled to your views, Doctor -'

'I believe the growths removed from Mr Austen have renewed themselves.'

'Ridiculous,' said Roley, although his imperious tone was gone. 'And how would you come to believe that?'

'He sneaked into the Restraint Room,' sniped Maria.

'Is this true? You went to Dreamland without my say-so?' Roley demanded.

'Perhaps Mr Sandman hit me with his magic beam.'

Roley stared back at him. 'Perhaps that explains then why you are so mistaken. Maria and I gave all my subjects a full and rigorous physical examination only two weeks ago, to check they were being in no way affected by any of my treatments. Didn't we, Maria?' Maria nodded and deposited his breakfast back in front of him. This time Roley pushed it away, sighing. 'Crikey Moses, Doctor, I'm really not the barbarian you take me -'

The Doctor cut across him. "There is a cystlike deposit a good couple of inches long in his shoulder, directly underneath the scar which marks the position of its last manifestation.'

'Manifestation?' scoffed Roley. 'What kind of medical terminology is that?'

'This is no conventional trauma. Do you believe it possible that one incident

of mental seizure could generate a membranous sac of semisolids that size in less than a day?'

'Possible,' argued Roley, 'if not well documented.'

'I think that explanation suits you because it has no place in your attempts to rationalise the situation,' snapped the Doctor.

'My attempts? If this is the case -'

'It is. 'The Doctor's voice was again low and compelling. 'It is also the case that Austen has demonstrated remarkable strength in ripping through his straitjacket and throwing me all over your euphemistic Dreamland.'

Roley got to his feet, sending his chair flying, his voice high-pitched. 'You picked a fight with a patient in my care?'

The Doctor rose also. 'He's unwell, he attacked me.'

'I dread to think what damage you may have done to him.'

'He was acting psychotically, imagining he was in hell, in the cave.'

'Vivid hallucinations,' declared Roley. 'It merely strengthens my resolve to get to the bottom of all this.'

The Doctor took a deep breath. 'Nurse Bulwell -' he looked at her, meaningfully - 'eventually administered a sedative and put him out. Now I need to perform a biopsy on that growth in his shoulder.'

'The growths were examined when first removed, they were perfectly benign.'

'No, Dr Roley, they simply weren't considered malignant by your medical science. That doesn't mean they weren't serving some higher function.'

Roley stared. 'Our medical science?'

Maria bristled. 'A higher function?'

The Doctor looked at the scepticism on their faces, and forced himself to calm down. 'If you're right, Dr Roley, and there's some kind of mental phoenix rising from the ashes of the ancient racial unconsciousness in these people, then that "cyst" could be significant in determining its purpose.'

Roley sat back down. 'And you wish to undertake this examination?'

The Doctor nodded, slowly for once.

Roley looked at Maria. 'And you'll work under our supervision?'

'With my own equipment, yes. As long as you cease your meddling with the minds of your other guests until I have results.'

'I can't put all my research on hold, man - I'm paying these people by the day,' Roley protested.

'Please, it's important -'

'I think he's right,' said Maria.

Both men looked at her. 'You do?' asked the Doctor, surprised.

'I saw what Austen was like. Totally psychotic. It wasn't right.'

Roley looked pathetically forlorn. 'But, Maria -'

The Doctor looked beseechingly at him. 'I'm a fast worker, Dr Roley. You won't have to wait long. I just need to get some apparatus from my... store outside, and I'll set up wherever you wish.'

Roley still looked deflated. 'One of the spare rooms,' he said, eventually. 'Maria, ask Cynthia to make arrangements, would you?'

'Splendid!' beamed the Doctor. But, when Maria left the room, his face furrowed into concern.

'What is it now?'

'Whatever I find, I'd advise you to be very careful in proceeding down this road with your subjects, Dr Roley.'

Roley gave a short, hollow laugh. 'Seems you're minding things very effectively for me, Doctor. What's the matter? Worried our "mental phoenix" will object to having its wings clipped a little?'

The Doctor leaned forward. 'If something that ancient were to return from the dead, would it countenance any limits to its flight?'

4.1
Captain Watson on Deliverance Day [1944]

I waited for him there on the beach, kneeling on the sinking sand, red water sloshing about my boots. It made sense that he would come then, woken carry this morning, grinning out of the blood and the noise and the churned-up sand. Happy and at home.

So I knelt there and wondered if he'd think I was praying, and, if so, who to. Truth was, I was just kneeling. My senses were shattered like the scraps of soldier lining the beach. I felt that, like theirs, my mind was shrieking to be made whole, pleading with anyone who might listen not to let them die. It was an invocation, I felt, my senseless head and their senseless creaming, and we were all waiting, dead and dying together.

I thought of my men. All of them held in high security before the off, sweating it out, looking round the fields lining their camp, knowing they'd never see them again. Job to do, and orders were orders. Fine lads in the Fifth. All those boys, sitting shivering and vomiting in the largest armada ever assembled. June 1944 and liberation was in sight. Liberty was never achieved without sacrifices. What ritual then was tearing their bodies and heads apart so their minds could slosh through the holes and out into the wet sand? I couldn't see it, I couldn't see it at all. It was chaos, and there is only one so pleased by chaos. He would look kindly on our sacrifices.

Leading the way, the minesweepers had gone out first, then the submarines, then the three British battleships. It was a rough crossing as we ploughed through the sea. I remember the stench as we scrabbled down the rigging from the battleships to the landing craft. The floor was covered in sick, we slipped and skidded on it as we launched out, eleven miles from an invisible shore. The faces around me, young, pale, nervous. Holding on for dear life as we were tossed around for hours, explosions exciting the sea still further, the noise, the bloody terrible noise that thundered around us. We none of us knew where we were going. The men looked to me for guidance, but I knew only that we were heading for the beach. That was all. I took them all in, my men, all huddled together and comfortless as we pitched forward and back, our boat like a child's toy in the waves.

Through smoke and confusion the shore came to us unbidden in the end. Stakes were smashed into the water as if an army of undead lay vanquished beneath the sea. So many obstacles as we came in. People began to die in the back of the boat as the bullets came in range. The show had begun, although the crowd of metal bars rising jauntily out of the water to observe us stood silent as we launched into the waves to take the beach. 'Move in!' I remember shouting, though it didn't sound like me. These were orders, and orders carried out always pleased. The men understood that, as they stared wildly around in the smoke and the bullets and the bombs, half their number already taken, bobbing around in the water. Just move in, move in. Keep going forward and don't die.

I watched them stare around and wade forward, the absolute shit scared out of them. Individuals, whole units, taking it all into their own hands. How could you hope to co-ordinate that? This had been our great and mighty plan for deliverance from evil. Throw enough men at a beach and they'll fill it. If you have to die, boys, move in and die!

I'd come through so much. You could say I was something of a hero; if you did, I wouldn't mind, although I might smile a little. I like to feel that my actions then were pleasing. On the beach it made perfect sense to me that he'd come then. It was the only thing that did make sense. The end was in sight, now, one way or another.

I'd glimpsed him more frequently, too. The damnedest thing - the air would... shimmer, almost, like it did over the valleys back home, and I'd see them all: their men, our men, all of us with demons on our backs, faceless imps, weightless and fat, tugging at us while we were too scared ever to notice. It's when I realised we were all the same, regardless of the sides we stood on or the helmets we wore. We were all of us guilty and all to be judged. Meat to be stripped clean. He'd stand above us with a big, red, terrible smile, and us his feast to be devoured. All of us lost.

I waited there by the shore as men continued to move in and die around me; blown to pieces, some of them, others drowning as they tried to scream with saltwater lungs. What was it like at Omaha? I wondered. And I remember that was my last thought before I pitched forward, my face pressed against wet, cold metal, some piece of debris in the lapping waves. I sank my head under the water to muffle the rattling of the guns, the screaming, all of that. You know.

It went on, and it went on, and it went on. Some of us got there, took out the enemy, won. Nine thousand people either dead or wounded. Think about that number. It's meaningless as a phrase, but try to picture it as soldiers in a line. Imagine how long it would take to walk along that line, picture how far it would stretch. It's all right, you've time enough - the soldiers can't break their line and run away. They're soldiers. They have no choice.

Because men - and men like me, I suppose - never gave them a choice.

4.2

Sam was walking unsteadily towards Roley's front door when it flew open and out stormed the Doctor.

'Catch,' she said, and fell into his arms.

'Sam! Sam, Sam, Sam, Sam,' he fussed. 'Let me look at you. You're hurt! Oh dear...' He supported her as they walked off towards the TARDIS. 'Cup of tea will do you good. Oh, Sam, Sam, Sam... That's a nasty cut on your head. Did the muggers do that?'

'Muggers?' asked Sam. 'Where did you get that idea?'

'Well, Fitz phoned last night -'

'Did he?' Sam shook her head, thinking about the way they'd parted company. 'Well. They could've been muggers, I suppose.'

'I'm so, so sorry.'

'Why, did you put them up to It?'

The Doctor looked at her strangely. 'Of course not!'

'That was a joke.' She swayed, almost losing her balance. 'I'm a fall-down comedienne.'

'Come on,' said the Doctor, lifting her up and cradling her. 'I think this is more serious than we thought.'

'That makes a change,' Sam said.

***

Maria came back into the dining room. 'Cynthia's sorting out the room now,' she announced.

'Et tu, Brute? ' muttered Roley, turning his back.

'What does that mean?' Maria hurried over to him. 'I'm no brute!'

'Taking the Doctor's side, after all we've been through to get this far. Oh, look, there goes Mrs Loyalty, sneaking out the back way.' Roley couldn't bring himself to look at her.

'By agreeing with him, we got him to leave us alone. Didn't we?'

Roley looked at her, like a small boy wanting to believe in Father Christmas. 'We did?'

'Now we can do what we like while he looks at that... whatever it is in Austen. I heard the two of them talking in Dreamland. I didn't understand much but I'm sure it could be important.' She looked imploringly at him. 'If it helps you with your studies, let him get on with it while you get on with the research. 'A broad smile dimpled her cheeks. 'Uninterrupted.'

A huge, gummy grin gripped Roley's face, and he squeezed her hand. His tittering disguised the sound of her involuntary sigh of delight at having pleased him.

***

Sam sat in the Doctor's armchair, gripping the bright-red mug of tea till her fingers went white as she recounted her tale.

'And it... I don't know, it was like its eyes lit up when it saw Roley's place.'

'It? Saw?'The Doctor was perched on the central console in the vast TARDIS control room. His questions rang out, tiny echoes flitting about the blue shadows that surrounded them.

'I got the feeling it was looking, like reading a book of all my thoughts... And it lingered on what happened yesterday, it was... thrilled .' Sam suddenly felt a bit self-conscious. 'It wasn't human, Doctor. I know it.'

'Do you?'

'Yes. The way it looked, the way it spoke, it felt... alien.'

'"Alien filth".'The Doctor frowned. 'I wonder...'

'And the fear I felt, the fear .'

'I know. I understand.'

Sam glared at him. 'No, you don't know. This was like something I've never felt before.' She shivered suddenly. 'I can still feel it, somewhere. It's like... Oh, I don't know. Deep-rooted. Primitive. Instinctual:

She looked at him.

The Doctor affected to scrutinise a button on his frock coat. 'It was a frightening situation, no doubt about it.'

Sam sighed. 'It was more than that, OK? Anyway, I woke up this morning...' She couldn't face explaining all that. 'Came back here. But I felt that feeling of terror, Doctor, of real terror, again. On the way here.'

The Doctor looked up sharply. 'When? Exactly when?'

'Would've been about twenty past six, I suppose.' She looked at him. 'Why?'

'Interesting. Around the same time our friend Mr Austen took a particularly energetic morning constitutional.' He pursed his lips. 'I wonder...'

Sam walked over to join him. 'Doctor... I know what you'll say, but can't we just... well, go?'

'Go? No.'

'Why?'

He smiled, faintly. "The usual reasons.'

Sam turned away from him, and he called after her.

'The way to overcome fear is to face it, to understand it. We both know

that.'

'You always presume you know what I know,' Sam snapped, massaging her bruised head. 'Just 'cause I'm young, blonde and human , you -'

'You're scared Sam, I know that. Scared of yourself, maybe. Scared that those microorganisms from Bel, even now you know they've gone, might have altered your mind somehow... left you more vulnerable to madness.'

She screwed up her eyes to try to stop tears from escaping.

'That's why you're so uncomfortable here, around people like Mr Austen. Isn't it?'

Sam didn't speak until she was sure her voice wouldn't tremble. The Doctor said nothing either.

'Yeah, well... People like him have always scared me.' She took a shaky breath. 'Lunatics. Spastics, or whatever they're called now. Mentally handicapped. When I was in Brownies we used to go round mental homes at Christmas and sing carols in the wards. Not that they seemed to notice. I used to shake so much I could hardly hold the carol sheet. It was like there was nothing there at all inside them... Nothing would be preferable to being like that. It wasn't fair.' She listened to the hum of the TARDIS, tried to concentrate on it, feeling it reverberate through her, hoping it would soothe her. 'It's like... when my gran went senile. She... I loved her so much but I was so scared of being around her, calling me by the wrong name, not knowing any of us, who she was, where she was.' She rounded on the Doctor. 'How can I face a fear like that? How can you understand something that... well, that nobody can ever understand because that's the whole point. Because it's insane'. She exhaled deeply and reluctantly walked over to him, accepting the inevitable hug, feeling the softness of his silk cravat against her hot face. 'Irrational. Meaningless.'

'Oh, you've got your good points too,' whispered the Doctor.

'Cheeky git.'

He was stroking her hair. It made her realise it needed washing. Imperfect, human... So comforting after those nightmares of perfection.

'Why am I still so scared, Doctor?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'At least, I think I don't know.'

'What are you on about?'

'Well... All the people in Roley's so-called care have been recounting similar experiences about that cave -'

'The one you've seen before?' Sam interrupted.

'Yes, if I could only remember where and when... And yesterday, before you left, Lucy told us that Captain Watson wasn't feeling well - as Austen wasn't - and that maybe there was something going around... Last night you endured some kind of psychic attack that seems to have had an effect on tissue generation in Mr Austen's body' (Sam didn't stop him to make him explain that last bit – she was just happy he believed her now without question) 'and this morning you experience a primal fear at the same time Mr Austen acts out a terrified shadow-play of his own.'

'So?'

'I'd be surprised if the events weren't linked, wouldn't you?'

'But how?'

'Some kind of unconscious knowledge, a hidden connection... You know, in the same way plants always grow faster before a thunderstorm.'

Sam looked at him. 'You think a storm's coming.'

4.3

Sam had watched the Doctor pack a ludicrous assortment of technical bric-a-brac into an unfeasibly small metal carry-case that wasn't even bulging. It looked like a cheap gag on a comedy show.

'And for your next trick?'

The Doctor smiled beguilingly. 'I get you to carry it for me.'He made a great show of hefting it off the floor, then passed it to her quite casually. She held it, a surprised grin forming on her face. Years ago she would've made out she was too cool to question how it worked. That was before she'd realised life was too short.

'You levitating all this, then?'

'It's cleverer than that,' said the Doctor, still smiling. 'I've put a pocket dimension inside with zero gravity, with an interface regulator in the clasp. Space and weightlessness. A boon to those who can't travel light.'

'Or those who have to set up their own lab in Castle Frankenstein?'

Soon they were walking back through the grounds to Roley's mansion. The sky was a pale blue and the sun was warm on Sam's skin. Even so, she had goose pimples. Her talk in the TARDIS had left her feeling calmer but as they drew nearer to Roley's she was feeling apprehensive again.

'So Roley's agreed to give his little devils a break, then?' she asked with forced levity.

'Apparently.' He patted her on the back. 'And I don't believe him for a moment. I'd like you to keep an eye on him. And particularly on Nurse Bulwell.'

'Nasty bit of work, that one.'

'Hmm. Of course, another way of making sure they leave the patients alone -'

'- is to stay with the patients?' Sam sighed. 'Yeah. I thought you might say that.'

***

Watson sat on his bed, surrounded by books. There were cases full of them in his room; one of the provisos he'd insisted on if he was to remain cooped up here and poked about at was that his library be here with him.

He'd never had much time for books before the war. He was always out and about, always active. Never been tied to a wife, or to children. They'd envied him that in the army. He suspected it was how he'd made rank so fast - not so much to lose, always up in the front line, always taking the biggest risks. Too much too soon.

That world was sealed off now, behind frosted glass thick with grime. For all the years he'd been unable to live life, he had read about others doing so instead. It was a passable substitute, he decided, and seemed as real as anything else.

Watson reached for a black book on his dresser, but was distracted by a yellowing photograph in a silver frame next to it. Eli, proud as you like in his stripes, just before he'd gone off to Korea. His poor little brother Elijah, who, like his namesake in the Bible, had gone off into the wilderness and should've been fed by the ravens, not to them. Torn apart in battle. Watson could picture the scene too easily, knew who to blame, shrank from doing so in fear.

Watson swallowed hard and picked up the book. Eli had sent him it to help him make sense of his condition. Aleister Crowley,*The Book of the Law* . He turned to a heavily thumbed page and read aloud to himself in the quiet of the room.

Strong and successful men always express themselves fully, and when they are sufficiently strong no harm comes of it to themselves or others.

He closed the book again, reverentially. 'Sufficiently strong'. He'd waited all his life to feel that way, to finally make some sense of the pain and the chaos. Perhaps he was still striding away from the One, away from God, away from the light and into the night. But as long as he was strong, as

long as he could remain in charge of his energies, no harm could ever come of it again.

More Crowley came back to Watson, the words spurs to his potential. How many long nights had he lain awake muttering the words? 'Every man and woman is a star.'

There was a knock at the door.

Watson put down his book. 'Come in, Lucy,' he said.

***

It took a couple of hours but at last the Doctor's makeshift lab was ready for business. Sam hadn't been far off the mark with her Castle Frankenstein comment: chunky metal gadgets fed pipes into glass tubes bristling with probes and antennae, which in turn were balancing, held by rusty iron clamps, above grotty-looking Bunsen burners. The incongruous mix of old and new was so typical of the Doctor. She wondered whether half of this equipment was actually necessary or just there to impress.

'Now for the star of the show,' said the Doctor, dusting off his hands on his coat.

'This cyst thing?'

'Yes. I think we'd better find Nurse Bulwell.'

***

Fitz was dragged back to the land of the wish-they-were-living by a heavy knocking at his front door. Immediately, he felt his heart freeze in his chest with terror. The men from last night. They were back.

'Mr Kreiner? This is the police. Open up, please.'

Not the men. The boys in blue. Well, he was out.

'Come on, Mr Kreiner, we know you're in there.'

How? They were bluffing. Or Sam. She'd blown the whistle on him, probably to save her own bacon. Or to save her own cabbage, as she only ate vegetables. Hey, he'd have to try that one on her when he saw her next; make them laugh and you're halfway to -

The knocking sounded again. Fitz put some clothes on and went downstairs. He'd done nothing wrong. He was a hero, for God's sake. He could handle a couple of flatfoots, of course he could.

Fitz opened the door and squinted into the sunlight at the two bobbies. 'Don't tell me,' he said, before they could open their mouths, 'my old mum's been taking the back off one-armed bandits again.'

The constables were stony-faced. 'You Fitz Kreiner?' the old one said. He looked like Dixon of Dock Green. Probably helped his standing in the nick no end.

'Yeah.' No point denying it. 'Have you come to ask me to play at your summer ball?'

'There was a murder last night.'

Fitz did his best to look astonished. 'What? Who?'

'A Mr Teddy "Chubby" Withers,' chipped in the other one, who was surely too young and spotty to be a policeman.

'Chubby?' echoed Fitz, shaking his head. 'Poor sod.'

'He was last seen at a club in Mercer Street we believe you frequent,' added Spotty.

'I "frequent" a lot of clubs,' said Fitz, making it clear he resented the allegation.

'Did you or did you not attend Molly's on Mercer Street last night?' said Dixon.

'Er... yes,' Fitz conceded. Stupid! No more trying to be clever. Just answer their questions.

'Eyewitnesses claim he was ejected from the club just after you left with a young woman,' enthused Spotty.

Fitz gave him a withering look. 'Yeah, I left with a young woman, but I never saw what happened to Chubby. We weren't exactly looking for *aménage á trois* , if you know what I mean.'

Dixon nodded, gravely. 'And this young woman is with you now?'

'Er... no.' Bugger, thought Fitz. 'She left.'

'Did she, now? And when was that?'

'Look, she got a cab home. We had an argument.'

'Eyewitnesses claim the two of you had your argument with Mr Withers in Molly's,' piped up Spotty again with indecent enthusiasm.

'Chubby had a big mouth and wandering hands,' Fitz protested. 'It was nothing.' The policemen seemed unconvinced. 'Look, officers, I left Molly's, I lost my bird, I came back home and slept the sleep of the just.'

'The just run out of luck,' growled Dixon, pushing past Fitz. 'Think we'd better have a little look round, sir, don't you?'

Sam sat awkwardly on a sofa, wishing that Roley would show up and join them. He may be a bit of a prat but at least he was... normal. He'd retreated into his study by himself. As for the others, Lucy and Watson were nowhere to be seen, Fitz's mum was still in bed after her ordeal of last night (why wasn't Sam in bed after her ordeal of last night?), Nurse Bullwell was up with the Doctor taking out Austen's lump and Cynthia was cleaning up somewhere. Which left Peter Taylor and Russell Waller for company, and some of the most stilted conversation she'd ever stumbled through.

'At least you're out in the countryside,' Sam said.

'Yes,' agreed Russell.

'So what?' said Taylor.

She shrugged. 'Well, it's better than the city, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'No. Nothing to do, is there?'

'Well...' Sam thought hard. 'At least it's relaxing.'

'Yes.'

Taylor shifted his bulk off the sofa and slunk out of the conservatory, slamming the door behind him.

Sam sighed. So much for keeping an eye on the patients.

'So, Russell, tell me...' He was looking intently at her, concentrating on her every word and nodding studiously, kiss curl concrete over his forehead. 'Have you got any hobbies?'

Russell considered this at length. 'No,' he concluded.

***

Bulwell grimaced as the Doctor removed the growth from the incision in Austen's shoulder. It was about three inches long, black and glistening, enclosed in a thin layer of transparent mucus.

'Would you sew him up for me, please?' the Doctor asked. Bulwell nodded. "Thank you.' He peered at the lump, held gently by the steel forceps. 'I want to study this straight away.'

Bulwell threaded her needle, concentrating, trying to push the image of the cyst from her mind.

It had looked for all the world like a leech.

4.4

Fitz sat on his orange amp, smoking furiously. He couldn't believe these coppers: they didn't have a warrant, he should've refused to let them in. Now they were going through his stuff. Thank God he kept his top drawer locked. He didn't think even these overzealous constables would resort to malicious damage. He had nothing to hide - at least, nothing from last night. Let them search. What harm could it do?

His heart sank when he saw Dixon waving a bottle of his mum's pills around and Spotty triumphantly brandishing a shirt. It was the one Fitz had been wearing last night.

'You doing my washing for me, now, are you?' Fitz inquired.

'There's blood on it,' said Spotty, waving a sleeve at him.

Eh? Damn, probably Sam's from the cut on her head where he'd dropped her. 'I had a nose bleed,' he said, coolly. 'What of it?'

'These pills yours, son?' asked Dixon.

'They're my mum's. Old ones.'

'Your mum's. Right. And where's she then, eh? Her bed don't look slept in.'

'She's gone away,' said Fitz, his heart sinking.

'People don't stick around long with you, son, do they?'

'I can give you an address!'

'What are these pills, then, sir?' chipped in Spotty.

'Chlorpromazine. My mum's got... a condition.'

Dixon walked over to him. 'It's your own condition you'd better start worrying about, lad. You're coming down the station with us.'

Fitz choked up a cloud of fag smoke. 'You're joking me.'

'Am I laughing?'

This was so unfair. Here was no cheery, genial copper, but a satanic Dixon who commuted to Dock Green from hell.

Fitz sighed. 'I'll get my coat.'

As he walked past them, a wild impulse overtook him, and, before he'd even worked out what he was doing, he'd nipped through the front door, which was still ajar.

'Oi! Get yourself back here!'

'Don't make it hard on yourself, son!'

'I'm late for work!' Fitz shouted, ignoring the angry yells of the policemen as he pegged it down the street faster than he would've believed possible, legs and lungs aching.

'End of Act Two, where are you?' he gasped to himself.

***

Watson kissed Lucy lightly on the forehead. Her eyes opened, wide and dark. Her gaze could melt chocolate, he mused. Her teeth were showing in her smile, the enamel left ragged in patches by the endless medication over the years. It didn't matter.

'You're beautiful, Lucy,' he said, brushing aside a stray dark hair from her cheek.

'Am I?' she whispered to him. 'Really?'

Watson smiled and looked up at himself in the mirror. His tie was straight, his blazer immaculate, trousers neatly pressed.

'I have to go now. Roley wants to have his sport.'

Lucy nodded. 'Later, you can have yours with me.'

She heard the door click shut. Almost now. So close this time. Soon.

***

The Doctor carefully took the growth out of his scanning device and waited for the results to calibrate, hi the meantime, he placed a small sample of the black, sticky matter in a test tube of clear fluid.

'What's cooking?' he pondered, angling the Bunsen flame.

***

Roley switched on the noise machine, enjoying the little tremors of excitement the unearthly sounds sent through him. Perhaps it was also the risk of being caught that thrilled him, although what real business it was of the Doctor's he didn't know. The lights swirled around the darkened room, catching and distorting still further on the folds of the heavy drapes. He rubbed his hands together with glee, fascinated by the way Watson's twitching arm gradually became still.

***

'Oh, Nurse Bulwell -' began Sam in a glorious rush of relief, as Maria opened the door and spared both her and Waller a cursory glance.

'I'm busy,' the nurse called back, shutting the door behind her.

Are you now? wondered Sam.

***

Roley motioned Bulwell to be silent as she gingerly entered his study, miming that Watson was asleep. 'Well under,' he added in an excited whisper.

'Where is he?' asked Maria, smiling salaciously. It felt deliciously naughty to be doing this, sharing this man's innermost thoughts between the two of them.

'Well, I seem to have succeeded in rolling back time beyond the life span of the patient,' said Roley, enthralled.

'Why?' asked Bulwell, her smile faltering slightly.

'Well... I really didn't try. It was as if it was being thrown up by his subconscious, offered up, straight away!'

'Where is he?'

'The 1820s, I think,' said Roley, scratching his nose. 'Seems he thinks he was in an asylum then, too, a vagrant lunatic. Anyway, shh!' He pointed to the tape machine, which was recording now rather than playing.

'We'd like some particulars, now, please,' said Roley to Watson, placid on the couch. 'Tell us your name.'

'William Watson of Aberdare, if it pleases your honour,' he mumbled.

Roley spun round and stared at Maria. 'That's his great - no, his great-great -grandfather!'

Maria folded her arms, as if suddenly cold. 'How can that be?'

***

Sam started to rise from her chair to keep an eye on Bulwell, but Russell started waving his hands.

'No... Oh, please,' he stammered. 'Don't go yet.'

Sam sighed. 'Cause we're having so much fun, she thought. She couldn't think of much else to talk about. Russell couldn't have been much older than she was, but there the similarity ended. Not only had the guy been in and out of loony bins for most of his life, the life he had had was one alien to her own. No Blackadder quotes to laugh over... No remembering the Moomins, Pacers, the House Sound of Chicago or Mel and Kim. No common cultural touchstones at all.

But he was looking so pleadingly at her, poor little sap. Snooping on Butwell could wait a couple more minutes, she decided.

'What do you put in your hair?' she tried in desperation.

Immediately Russell froze, as if he'd switched from the yes-and-no game to musical statues.

'Brylcreem or something?' she prompted.

'Yes.'

'Right.'

'I do this with it.' He gripped his hair and pulled down on it with both hands again and again.

'All right, I think I get the idea,' said Sam.'Why do you do that?'

'I... I...'

Sam frowned. He seemed to be listening to something far in the distance.

***

The Doctor studied the diagnostic printout from his machine, and turned to look at the growth, lying like a fat slug in a Petri dish.

'Well, well,' he said. 'Who's a clever boy, then?'

***

'I found myself at Greenock in Dumbartonshire, early entered into the East India Company's service, where I was second mate of the William Pitt , East Indiaman of fourteen hundred tons...'

'I've no way of verifying any of this, of course,' muttered Roley, scattering pages of notes for personal details in Watson's file, frowning at what looked to be a marmalade stain on one of them. 'We'll have to check historical records, but...'

Maria still had her cardigan wrapped tight around her. 'How could he have been his own great-great-grandfather in a former life?' she said, afraid.

'Oh, Maria, really!' stormed Roley, almost shaking with excitement. "This isn't about reincarnation! Don't you see, woman? It's his subconscious speaking. This history - if it all checks out - could've been passed down genetically, encoded somehow in his mind!'

'Or maybe he was told it,' said Maria. That was more comforting. But she shook her head, clutched her arms together still harder. 'There's something wrong, Charles. This isn't like the old bat having a turn.'

***

The Doctor was still hunched over the dark lump in the dish, which glistened like wet flesh. 'A dormant rudimentary intelligence...' he whispered. 'I wonder if you're the reason Mr Austen was so concerned with "alien filth"...'

A loud fizzing started up from the Doctor's test tube, and he spun round to examine it. The liquid was turning yellow as it bubbled around the little black deposit.

***

Watson was still muttering. 'My brother... Perfect twin he was, like looking in a mirror... Captain in the 13th Dragoons in the East Indies, he was... Then I had a bad typhus fever in Bengal, I nearly -'Abruptly the voice changed, grew hoarse, the accent broader. 'Nearly died, I did, nearly died an' went to hell... But I got away an' I been burning ever since!'

***

'- been burning ever since!'

Sam felt her blood turn cold as Russell started laughing hysterically after the words had spilled from his lips. She got up and backed away to the door as the young man continued his babble. 'Was once looked after very nicely by Mr Cressy-Angel of Northampton...'

***

'.. .I'll I bit the bugger's head off and hid 'im in my death cave!' Lucy spat out the words, writhing in Watson's bed, arms flailing about pushing books off the dresser. 'So much gristle he was at the end...'

***

Sam charged upstairs. She knew Fitz's mum was up there and felt she should see if the old lady was all right.

She needn't have worried about finding the right room. It could only be Mrs Kreiner slumped in the corridor, a sheet twisted round her body, twitching and shaking in the midst of a fit.

'Devils... Clustering of devils there on the living, girl...' she whimpered. 'It's a death cave right enough, and there's room for us all.' Her voice became lower, louder, as she stared at Sam. 'Room for us all!'

Cynthia came out on to the landing and screamed as Mrs Kreiner sprang athletically to her feet and advanced towards Sam.

***

'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law!' thundered Watson, his face turning crimson. 'The whole of the law!'

'Make him stop!' yelled Bulwell.

***

The Doctor peered closely at the crystals forming in the churning solution. 'I wonder...'

Suddenly a heavy force smashed into the door. It came again, and the heavy wood began to splinter.

Instinctively the Doctor grabbed for the cyst to protect it - then screamed in agony. Like the leech it resembled, the fibrous growth was burrowing into

his hand. His blood squirted over the table as he willed himself to stay calm and use the forceps to remove it.

He heard a voice outside. 'Do what thou wilt...'

Then the door was smashed in, sagging on its hinges. Through his pain, thrashing about on the floor trying to remove the leech from his palm, the Doctor saw Peter Taylor staring wildly about the room.

"The whole of the law!'Taylor bawled, pushing over a table full of equipment and lunging for the Doctor.

***

Sam stood, shaking, at the top of the stairs.'Don't do this,' she begged, shaking her head.

Mrs Kreiner stalked towards her, dribbling.

***

'I can't stand this,' said Maria, running from the room.

Roley barely noticed her go. 'Listen to me, William Watson, listen to me...'

'Ain't no William Watson here, chief.' Watson's eyes opened and focused on his own. 'Reckon you got old Nick coming.'

***

Taylor still sat, shaking and frothing at the mouth, when Maria burst in, looking for Sam.

Taylor turned to look at her. '"Dress ye all in fine apparel",' he uttered, his voice a soulless drone. '"Eat rich foods and drink sweet wines..."'

***

'"...and wines that foam!"'

Lucy shook as she pulled the heavy knife with its serrated blade from its worn leather sheath, mumbling the words of Crowley's own Koran as she stumbled out the door. "Also, take your fill and will of love as ye will..."'

***

'"...when,where and with whom ye will..."'

It's only an old woman, thought Sam. It's only an old woman who's sick and needs help, and I thought you believed in causes, for God's sake!

Mrs Kreiner's arms were outstretched. Sam shut her eyes and grabbed for the woman, pulling her down on top of her on to the thick plush carpeting of the landing. She was dimly aware of Cynthia screaming again and running past them. Then she opened her eyes and saw the old woman's wrinkly, twisted face hovering inches from her own.

'Oh, you done it now,' spat Mrs Kreiner.

***

One of Taylor's huge hands swatted the Doctor's head back into the wooden floor with a loud, hollow bang. Then the other grabbed the Doctor's own and struggled for a hold on the leech.

'No,' said the Doctor, struggling weakly. 'Leave it, it will harm you!'

He felt the leech slither out of his palm and then consciousness left him.

***

Roley reactivated the noise machine and the light generator, his voice high-pitched in excitement and fear.

'We wish Captain Davydd James Watson to return to us. He shall return to us when I command on the count of three...'

The throbbing, pounding noises started up, but Watson sat there laughing.

***

Sam felt the old woman's bony hands tightening round her throat.

***

'Nurse Bulwell!' shouted Cynthia in floods of tears, rushing down the spiral staircase. 'It's the Doctor's friend, Sam, the old lady's got her!'

'What?' cried Bulwell, astonished, before thundering up the stairs.

Cynthia turned to find Russell Waller staggering towards her, veins pulsing in his temples, eyes wide.

'Help me,' he whimpered, his voice like a child's.

Cynthia was too scared even to scream any more. She held her hands to her mouth and shook her head, as tears flooded down her face.

***

Bulwell bustled on to the landing and grabbed hold of Mrs Kreiner. Even with her greater bulk, she had trouble holding on to the old woman, who struggled for release, kicking, cursing and swearing.

Sam tried to grab hold of one of Mrs Kreiner's spindly legs.

'Get Charles,' Bulwell hissed, unable to relax her grip on Mrs Kreiner for a second. 'Stop Watson's therapy.'

'She's going to hurt herself,' protested Sam.

'Do it!' yelled Bulwell.

Sam didn't hang around to argue further. She passed Cynthia at the foot of the stairs, who tried to grab hold of her arm. Sam pulled away.

'I've got to get Roley,' she said. 'Check on Russell.'

'He's gone,' sobbed Cynthia. 'He looked terrible, really scared. I think he was making for the west wing...'

'Help Nurse Bulwell; Sam ordered. 'And somebody get the Doctor!'

***

Sam caught a moment of the cacophonous light display in the room and then it stopped. The room was dark and still, save for the laboured breathing of Roley. Sam saw his shadowy form move to the curtains and pull them open. Daylight caught Sam unawares and she flinched.

'What have you done?' she asked in a quiet voice, looking at Watson, who was lying deathly still on the couch. 'Come on,' she said to Roley. 'Quick .'

'What?' Roley looked confused. 'I don't understand.'

'Well I hope someone can explain it to us both then; stormed Sam, "Cause there's some weird stuff going on out there!'

Roley looked shocked and flustered. 'I must check Watson's all right,' he said.

Sam gave up and just grabbed him by the cardigan sleeve, pulling him after her. 'Come on!'

***

When they reached Maria, the old woman was still, lying serenely in her arms, snoring lightly. 'It's like it never happened; Bulwell said, unable to bring herself to look at Roley.

'The old woman went loco,' Sam explained, while Roley looked at her, dumbfounded. 'Look, can't you get her some brandy or something? She's in shock.'

'I don't touch the stuff,' Maria snapped, tartly.

Sam shook her head. 'For Mrs Kreiner, I mean.'

'Young lady -' began Roley.

'You and Watson caused all this,' said Bulwell to Roley, miserably. 'They were all saying the same thing.'

'They?'

'The others... well, the old woman and Waller at least.'

Roley said nothing, letting the words sink in. 'If that's true, then my research -'

'You and your bloody research -' Sam began, but the flustered arrival of Cynthia stopped the quarrel escalating.

'The Doctor's laboratory is wrecked; she said, out of breath.

'What?' Sam went over to her and grabbed her. 'What about the Doctor? Is he OK?'

Before Cynthia could reply, Sam heard his voice."The Doctor is fine, thank you very much for asking.' He didn't took very fine, but Sam decided it was the best sight in the world, seeing him limp along the corridor towards them. She ran over to join him.

'You been playing chicken with the traffic again?' she said.

'Taylor attacked me.' He held his hand to his head. 'He was muttering something Cabalistic about doing what thou wilt being the whole of the law.'

'Taylor, too, then,' breathed Roley.

When the Doctor took his hand away, he left his forehead sticky with blood. Sam looked at the gash in his palm. 'Jesus, are you OK? Did Taylor do that to your hand?'

'If only he had,' sighed the Doctor, stooping to examine Mrs Kreiner and gently lifting her away from Nurse Bulwell and placing her back in bed. 'Has anyone seen him?' he called.

'I saw him,' said Cynthia. 'He was going the same way as Russell. In a hurry.'

"The west wing?' asked Sam. 'What's there?'

"The Restraint Room,' stated Bulwell.

'And Mr Austen,' said the Doctor, re-emerging from Mrs Kreiner's room with a pillowcase wrapped round his injured hand. 'Come on, quick!'

He sprinted off down the stairs, his limp forgotten, the others close behind.

***

'Oh no.'

The Doctor stood framed in the doorway, Sam by his side. She gasped, and turned back to Cynthia, stopping the girl from seeing. 'Go and check on Watson,' she instructed. Cynthia nodded and dashed away.

Sam felt Roley push up beside her. 'Oh, Crikey Moses,' he said, hollowly.

Lucy was sitting astride Austen's body in her nightdress, the cotton stained from white to crimson with blood. She held a knife in her hands, which had clearly been put to use on Austen's back. The skin was split along the length of the backbone.

Russell Waller sat on the couch, hand at the curl on his forehead as usual.

'No sign of Old Nobodaddy in there,' said Lucy, softly, not acknowledging her audience.

'No,' said Russell.

The Doctor noticed Taylor staring at him, blankly, and realised the man's hands were slick with blood, up to the wrists. He stepped into the Restraint Room and gently slipped an arm round Lucy, who seemed dazed, unseeing. He pulled the knife from her weak grip and lifted her away from the body, sitting her down next to Russell. She slumped against him, her black hair falling over his cheek, but Russell remained stock still.

Sam watched as Roley and Bulwell pushed past her to cram into the blood-

spattered white room. Taking a position behind the Doctor, they didn't obstruct her view as the Doctor gingerly fished inside the wound and, with the tip of the knife, dragged out a black, glistening object about the size of a finger.

'My God,' breathed Roley.

'It's another one,' whispered Bulwell.

'No,' said the Doctor, softly. 'It's the same one we took out earlier.'

Sam stared at him. 'What?'

The Doctor looked first at Taylor, then at Lucy and Waller, then at Sam. 'It seems they were trying to put it back inside him,' he said.

Sam felt her world tilt a little. She looked automatically at Lucy, looking like Lady Macbeth on the leather couch. Then she saw Russell, whose head had fallen forward slightly, the lock of hair hanging away from his high forehead.

For a second she glimpsed what the hair was hiding. A mess of scar tissue through which she could still quite clearly see three numbers, blue on the skin.

4.5

Cynthia found Watson whistling softly to himself on the couch in Roley's study.

'Hello, cariad ,' he said, smiling kindly at her. 'What's going on, then? Where's old Roley?'

'Dr Roley...' Cynthia had no idea what to say.

Watson clearly realised she'd been crying. 'Are you all right, my dear?' he asked.

'Fine,' said Cynthia, forcing a watery smile.

Watson clapped his hands together. "Then that makes two of us!'He swung his legs off the couch and stood up, patting his stomach. 'I don't know what he's done to me, but I haven't felt so well for years!'

***

Fitz sat morosely on the Green Line bus to West Wycombe. Some dynamic escape this was. A rattling old bag of bolts with just a drunk and some overenthusiastic shoppers for company.

Fitz Kreiner - fugitive. He felt sick. The police would really be after him now. He actually was late for work, but he couldn't go there now

- that was the first place they'd look. He tried to pull himself together

- he hadn't been formally accused of anything, after all. Perhaps they'd just wait for him to turn up. Maybe he should just saunter into a cop shop and explain everything. Yeah, they'd be really sympathetic. What the hell was he thinking of?

He knew he had to find Sam. She'd back him up, she'd have to.And, since his mum was there anyway, where else could he go?

'"Enjoy dreaming about living, Fitz,"' he said, mimicking Sam's voice and

sinking lower in his seat. 'Jesus... Somebody wake me up.'

Fitz noticed a solitary figure standing on the pavement, in a long, heavy-looking, dark-blue overcoat. The figure stared straight at him, and Fitz instinctively looked away.

The man had reminded him of someone, someone he thought he knew. But why had the man been smiling?

***

Between them, they'd taken Roley's bewildered test cases to lie down. Sam had steered Lucy back to her room, gingerly putting her into a fresh nightdress and tucking her in. The Doctor had assured her Lucy was harmless again now, that it was something to do with her illness that had caused her to act that way. Poor cow - she'd looked so confused, complaining it was daytime and that if the curtains hid the sky then she couldn't see it change, then falling straight into a deep sleep. She'd felt around the woman's shoulders, and had recoiled when she'd found a large lump between Lucy's shoulder blades.

Watson had been waiting outside the door. He'd made her jump.

'Can I see her? What's wrong?' he'd asked.

She'd tried to explain that Lucy had had an accident, that while she was all right now she still needed rest. Watson had just become increasingly agitated, ignoring her suggestion he come back later. She'd left him to it, in the end. Something about all this made her simply prefer not to get involved. There's a first, she thought.

Now she was sitting with the allegedly sane members of the household, while poor old Cynthia got to clear up in the Doctor's lab. Austen's body had been laid out in the Restraint Room, but it seemed to Sam that everyone had forgotten they had a slashed corpse under their roof as they all sat around drinking their tea.

Conferring with the Doctor and Bulwell, she'd gathered that the growths had renewed themselves in Russell. And Taylor, too. The Doctor said they should have a look at Watson, although he didn't doubt the leech would be

in him also. He pulled out the glass phial into which he'd put Austen's cyst.

'It's fascinating,' he added. 'This thing can survive perfectly well outside of a body in a dormant state.'

Roley pinched the bridge of his nose as if he had a headache and stared at the Doctor. 'Are you telling me it's alive?'

'In a way.' The Doctor got up and began pacing around. 'I've detected living crystals within, designed to respond to chemical excitation. It's some kind of biosynthetic organism.'

'Bio-what?' asked Bulwell.

'It's been manufactured, but it's alive,' said Sam.

'In a very limited sense,' said the Doctor, increasing his pacing to the annoyed glances of everyone in the room. 'I'm not sure it has any awareness as such, just a programmed set of responses.' He stopped short, as if something had just occurred to him. 'Programmed... of course...'

'You're barmy,' said Bulwell, flatly. 'All of this is barmy.'

Sam stood up. 'It's going to get a lot barmier when you try to explain it all to the police. 'The others all looked at her. "The longer you wait, the worse it's going to be.' Roley and Bulwell looked at each other, then at the Doctor. 'I mean, come on, you've got a dead body upstairs and the people who did it having a nap before lunch time. I'd have a bloody good story worked out if I were you.'

She realised the Doctor was looking a little sheepishly at her. 'What is it?' she asked.

'I don't believe we should tell the police at this stage,' he said.

'What?'

He came over to her, did his usual thing of holding her shoulders and saying, 'Sam Sam Sam...'

She shrugged him off. 'No! What are you saying?'

He was putting on his sincere face, speaking levelly in a low voice, urging her to trust in him. 'Whatever's happening here the police will only hamper my own investigations. I need to run DNA tests and brain scans on the patients here and -'

'Patients? You've changed your tune, haven't you?' Sam glared at him. "They were cured people a while ago, and now this pair have turned them into loony murderers!'

'How dare you?' stormed Bulwell.

Roley's voice, though quiet, caught all their attention. 'She does have a point.'

'Charles!'

'Oh, not you, Maria, no, I'm speaking for myself...' He smiled sadly, wiped his beaky nose with a hanky. 'You're quite right, Samantha. I'm really not sure how I'm going to explain away any of this to the authorities.'

'It's them, Charles, they're insane.' Maria placed a hand on his leg. 'What other explanation do you need to give?'

'But think of the publicity all this will attract. Think of my reputation.' He sighed. 'What will people think of me if my researches have caused such... chaos?'

Sam shook her head in disbelief. 'They'll think you should've knocked all this on the head a long time ago, and they're right.'

The Doctor spoke up. 'Er, Dr Roley, I really do think all this has got a little beyond the confines of your typewriter.'

'Exactly,' said Sam, pleased. 'Doctor, what about what happened to me last night? They're still out there. There's something the police could help us with. Don't you think we should be -'

'Later, Sam, later. One thing at a time.' He started pacing the floor again. 'Before we tell anyone anything, there are things I need to do.'

'Taken charge, have you?' sniped Nurse Bulwell.

'I honestly believe I'm the best-qualified to do so,' said the Doctor, earnestly.

Sam looked at him, felt her face flush. 'I'll just leave you to it, then,' she said, and stormed out of the room.

***

The Doctor watched her go, and sighed.

'You don't think she'd go to the police, do you?' asked Roley in a timid voice.

The Doctor looked at him gravely. 'Sam has a finely attuned sense of right and wrong, Dr Roley... but no.' He rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. 'I think she knows this is a bit of a grey area for moral absolutes. Don't worry.'

'Know everything, don't you?' said Bulwell.

'Not quite,' sighed the Doctor. 'Still. Ignorance is bliss, so they say.' He roused himself from his reverie. 'Now, I'd like you, Nurse Bulwell, to take a blood sample from Lucy, Watson, Taylor, Mrs Kreiner, Waller and Austen. 'A thought occurred to him. 'And you two as well, while we're at it.'

'Why us?' said Maria, suspiciously.

'For comparison, I'd imagine,' said Roley. 'You can start with me, if you like, Maria.'

With a final glare at the Doctor, Nurse Bulwell left to get on with it.

The Doctor crossed to the window, and stared out, apparently lost in thought. Roley sipped his tea. A few birds could be heard cluttering outside, a reminder of the comfortingly normal world outside.

'Why are you helping us?' Roley asked at length.

The Doctor didn't turn round. 'It's what I do.'

'How did you find out about me? Did you think I was doing something wrong? Is that why you came here?'

'I arrived by chance.'

'I'm not sure I believe you, Doctor.'

Still the Doctor didn't turn round. 'Sometimes, I'm not sure I believe it myself,' he said.

***

When Nurse Bulwell knocked on Lucy's door, she was surprised to hear Watson's voice instructing her to come in.

'Captain,' she said, acknowledging him.

He was sitting on the bed, Lucy's pale hand in his own. Couldn't he see what an unfit harlot the girl was? Her eyes fluttered open as Maria dumped her medical bag down on her bedside table.

Lucy waved at her, weakly. 'Hello, Nurse.' She was putting on a child's voice. 'Am I sick?'

'Nothing some rest won't cure.'

'How's Austen, then?' asked Watson, bluntly.

'I'm sure I've seen him recently, you know, but I simply can't remember,' said Lucy, keeping her gaze firmly on Maria.

'Yes. Well.' Maria tried to retain her cool. 'You'll have to ask Dr Roley himself about that.' She turned back to Lucy. 'Now, I'm just going to take a little blood from you. You'll have to slip off a sleeve of your nightie. Would you mind waiting outside for decency's sake, Captain Watson?'

'What do you want her blood for, anyway?' he asked.

'Dr Roley is simply running a test.'

'Dr Roley is a fool,' said Watson, calmly. Lucy giggled.

Maria narrowed her eyes. 'May I remind you, Captain Watson, that you are not only residing in Dr Roley's home, but that you are being amply paid for your participation in his researches?'

Watson smiled, effacingly. 'Of course I am. What can I have been thinking of?'

Maria looked at him, trying to hide her unease. 'Are you feeling quite well?'

'I've never felt better, Nurse Bulwell, never better,' he said, grinning broadly. 'Will you be wanting blood from me, too?'

'I will.'

'Best be careful,' said Watson, confidentially, leaning in too close. 'I'm feeling so strong I dare say you'll blunt the needle on my vein.' He laughed, and Lucy looked at him admiringly.

'Outside, if you please, Captain,' said Maria, briskly. I'll be with you in a few moments.'

Watson just smiled again, before striding out, leaving the door ajar.

'Like a different person, isn't he?' said Lucy, as her blood filled the phial.

***

Sam sat out on the grass in Roley's grounds, her mind racing but not sure what it was trying to outrun. Why was she so upset? She knew the police would be well out of their depth, just as she knew that the Doctor - probably - was doing what he was doing for a reason.

She felt exhausted, the memory of that terrible fear like a flame licking at the back of her mind.

Maybe that was it - she wanted to see something commonplace and safe triumph here, to see this freak party broken up. It wasn't as if she wanted out. The Doctor could study ail the leeches he wanted to in the TARDIS and together they could go looking for the pair that had put this fear into her. To stop them doing it to anyone else, ever again.

She shivered, and looked around her, still not quite able to lose that feeling of being watched.

***

The Doctor and Roley walked back to the makeshift lab. Cynthia had cleared up all the broken glass. Roley had sent home the rest of the staff, the kitchen hands, so as not to risk any of them overhearing something they shouldn't. In any case, no one appeared to be hungry.

'You should let Nurse Bulwell take a look at that hand,' Roley said.

'It's all right. I'm a fast healer.'

'And a fast worker,' Roley observed, looking round at the technological complications that filled the lab. He couldn't imagine where all this had come from.

'A fast bowler, too, come to think of it,' said the Doctor. 'I wonder if the three are linked.' He checked over some equipment, getting out a slender wand like tool that buzzed softly as he waved it about. "The leech burrowed into my flesh, but only to secure itself, I suspect'

'Why didn't it burrow into Taylor?'

'Because Taylor's already carrying one. It's clearly important to these poor people - that's why they tried to put Austen's back inside him.'

Roley shuddered. 'Horrible.'

"There's obviously an enormous sympathetic resonance between them.'

'Did I awaken that in them?'

'Probably, Dr Roley, probably. 'The Doctor's expression softened. 'It could just be their proximity to each other. They were trying to help Austen, I'm sure. They just lacked the know-how.'

'They killed him!' Roley protested, then looked down at the floor. 'But it's my fault, isn't it?'

'Your hypnotic assaults may have broken down barriers in their minds, leaving them more susceptible. 'The Doctor darted about from device to device making small adjustments and calibrations, occasionally throwing whole clumps of wires and circuitry over his shoulder. 'The impulses they're receiving - the instructions, or instincts, or whatever they are - they're misinterpreting them...'

'Receiving from what, Doctor? The leeches?'

'The leeches may just be transmitters of some kind.'

Roley perched himself on a stool. 'And so with Watson hypnotised and his subconscious mind wide open... his own leech's transmissions swamped the others.'

'Swamped them... or orchestrated them, yes.'

'Fantastic...' Roley shook his head, then stood up and joined the Doctor. 'Is it possible for the memories of blood relatives to be somehow encoded genetically, passed down to new generations and left untapped in the subconscious?' His voice sounded desperate even to himself. 'Could that explain race memory?'

'It's more likely the leech was passed on genetically and took the information with it,' said the Doctor, bluntly. 'I doubt it's a natural faculty. I told you, these leeches are synthetic in origin. They must have a function of some kind - maybe that's part of it.'

Roley sighed deeply. 'You know, things have all moved so swiftly, and the ramifications... A death under my own roof... With all my work, I don't even know what hypothesis I'm trying to prove any more. I can feel it all slipping away.'

The Doctor didn't look up from his tangle of wires. 'Science was never a great respecter of ambition.'

'But with it goes the chance to prove anything else,' said Roley, quietly.

***

Tarr burst back into the cave to find his friend still standing motionless.

'I think I've found them, Azoth!' he yelled, quivering with excitement. 'Aren't you pleased? I think I know where we can find the people who can tell us more!'

Azoth remained silent.

'Haven't I done well. Azoth?' said Tarr, hopefully.

'Quickly,' said Azoth, although the word came out anything but. 'We must go to them.'

Tarr nodded. 'I think we'll have to take one of those bus things.'

'No.' Azoth walked slowly over to the doorway. 'We will need personal transport.'

'Oh, lots of the people we took knew how to drive!' said Tarr. 'I could drive after the first learning. Easy. We'll find someone with a car.'

'Yes.'

Azoth made as if to leave, but Tarr called after him to stop.'I haven't bandaged you up yet,' he said. 'People might stare at us.'

***

Watson had returned to his room and was lying back on the bed in trousers and vest, a belt tied round his exposed arm.

He'd left the door open. 'Here I am, Nurse, all ready for you.'

Maria got out her syringe, then paused. 'Your arm,' she said, suddenly realising. 'It seems fine, now.'

'It is fine,' said Watson, smiling at her. 'Perhaps it's time for someone else to start shaking?'

***

Tarr laid the body of the young woman in the back seat of her car. He wondered who she was - or, rather, who she'd been. They hadn't needed to know anything she knew, so Azoth had simply killed her.

Now Azoth sat, immobile, in the passenger seat. People would probably assume Tarr was driving round a dressed mannequin, not his best, his only, friend.

'The bus was heading for somewhere called West Wycombe. We can try other places on its route too,' Tarr said happily. He reached for the handbrake, but the woman's arm was twisted against it. He pushed the arm away and smiled. 'What a lovely day it'll be!'

***

Maria eyed the Doctor mistrustfully. She'd never seen equipment like this before, and it was making a real mess of this room. The Doctor had scooped up the blood samples she'd taken for him and put them into a big metal thing that spun the phials around. Now they were stuck in a weird-looking metal box, and the Doctor seemed very serious. Pretending he knew what he was doing, she imagined.

'How long are you going to let him run rings round us?' hissed Maria to Roley.

'Please, Maria, not now.'

She ignored him. 'Things only blew up round here when be came along.'

'Aren't you forgetting Oscar Austen?' said Roley, sighing.

'Aren't you forgetting you're writing a book? A bestseller?' He said nothing,

and she tentatively put an arm round him, praying he wouldn't shrug her off. 'Well?'

'A man is dead.'

Maria frowned. 'Well... yes, but...'

Abruptly, the Doctor lifted his head from a tiny microscope, his hair flying around him with the violence of the movement. 'Fascinating! Each of them the same.'

Roley moved away from Maria, leaving her talking to thin air. 'What've you found, Doctor?'

'Austen, Lucy, all of them. They have some kind of adjunct to their DNA.'

'Their what?' Maria barged over to join them.

Roley turned to her. 'You know, it was in all the papers.'

We don't read the same papers, Maria reflected, sadly, as Roley continued.

'The building blocks of life, they call it. All the proteins and chemicals that make us what we are.' He gestured up and down Maria's body and she almost blushed. 'Crick and Watson won the Nobel for their research into it last year.'

'And Wilkins, of course,' the Doctor pointed out. 'What a way with crystallography that man had...' He shook his head. 'Anyway, it's as if some extraneous, unknown protein's been introduced to the chromosomes. It's causing all sorts of bonding anomalies.'

Roley concentrated. 'Adenine bases link to thymine, and guanine bases to cytosine, correct?'

'Correct; said the Doctor. 'In Nurse Bulwell's and your own DNA, certainly, and that checks out fine. But in the others, the guanine and cytosine are both bonding with a different base that doesn't even appear to be nitrogenous.'

'Impossible,' stated Roley.

The Doctor gave him a wry smile. 'Dangerous word to use, that.'

'That would break all the rules of stereochemistry,' Roley protested.

'I know,' said the Doctor. 'Frustrating, isn't it? Seems our friend the leech is something of an iconoclast.'

'You said it was just a transmitter.'

'Mmm... I imagine it's transmitting some kind of retro virus that's attacking the host RNA and replicating itself... That's why new leeches could be grown after the originals were taken out.'

'Retrovirus? RN- ?'

The Doctor cut Maria off. 'Whoops. You never heard me mention them.'

'So through whatever means,' said Roley, 'it's the leech that's generating the powers we've witnessed in Watson and the others.'

'I think it more likely they're just a side effect.'

Roley was becoming agitated. 'But if, as you say, the leech was manufactured, who could have done such a thing?'

The Doctor said nothing, so Maria ventured a question of her own.

'And why?'

***

Sam wondered how long she'd been lying in the grass, hoping to calm down, breathing deeply and trying to remember some old Shortlist lyrics, rubbish though they were.

Halfway through reciting yet another shoe-gazing epic about unrequited love and suicide, she sat up and looked around again. In the distance she could see a familiar gangly figure in a grey raincoat heading for the main

entrance.

'Hey, Fitz!' she called. He must be visiting his mum. Christ, she'd better tell him what had happened.

He heard the shout, and turned to see who was calling.

'Come on, then!' she added. What would she tell him? Watch out for your mum, Fitz, she tried to throttle me a few hours ago when she thought she was the devil.

He looked worried, embarrassed, aggrieved, all at once. 'Still talking to me, then?' Fitz said.

'No. Only shouting at you.'

'Can I sit here a sec?'

'Yeah,' said Sam. 'Yeah, I think you'd better.'

***

Roley was having a job taking in what the Doctor was telling him.

'How can you know all this?' he protested. 'I mean, we've only just begun to understand about DNA and yet you're telling me -'

'I'm afraid you'll just have to trust me.'

'Why should we?' said Maria. 'You're probably nuttier than all that lot put together.'

'Be quiet , Maria!' Roley snapped. He watched her flush bright red, saw her eyes become watery, and immediately blushed himself. 'I'm sorry, Maria, but... well, really, please ...'

Maria stalked from the room without another word.

Roley sighed again for what felt like the hundredth time. 'What are you going to do now, Doctor?'

'I'm going to put the leech in some of this blood and connect it to a reasonably accurate computer model of the human brain.'

Roley stared at him in further bewilderment. 'How on Earth would you attain such a thing?'

The Doctor smiled. 'From you, Dr Roley. This device has been scanning the chemical make-up of your hard-working head for the last half-hour. Mapping out your neurons, dendrites, axons... you know, that sort of thing.'

'But... in half an hour? I mean... how does it -?'

'There simply isn't time to explain.' He turned back to his work. 'You can run along now, if you like.'

Roley stared, agape. 'You mean you've tolerated my presence here while it's been of use to you?' His voice hardened. He even stopped it from squeaking. "That's awfully big of you, Doctor.'

The Doctor looked up. 'Oh, no!' he said, hastily. 'No, no, no, no... Ordinarily, I love answering questions. It's quite a hobby.' He punched Roley jovially on the arm. 'I simply thought you might want to run off and comfort Nurse Bulwell. She seems upset. Oh, and you know what would be terribly useful?'

Roley folded his arms. 'Please, do tell.'

'You practise more conventional relaxation techniques than your hypnotherapy, don't you?'

'I've trained with the best. I studied under -'

'Gather Watson and the others together.'

'Maria said they're resting.'

'Good; said the Doctor. 'Let's make sure they stay resting together where we can keep an eye on them.'

Roley's mood dissolved in a tizzy of panic. 'You don't think there's any further danger, do you?'

'I think it's always best to be prepared,' was the Doctor's comforting reply.

***

Fitz stared at Sam as if she had two heads as she came to the end of her story. 'And now there's been some kind of group murder? With my mum involved?' He laughed in disbelief. 'You know, if this is your way of getting me back for this morning -'

'Oh, of course it isn't,' she said. 'I'm sorry, I don't know what else I can say. It's just... well, it's all going pear-shaped in there.'

'What?' Fitz seemed puzzled.

'You know... going wrong. Out of hand.'

'You know, it's weird,' he said. 'I'd think you were having me on with all that, but...' He shook his head. 'I remember my old granddad babbling on about a cave like that when he was on his last legs. We thought he was just going mental again.'

'Again?' asked Sam.

'Runs in the family. Yeah, I know. Like noses do.' He sniffed, as if to emphasise the point. 'I'd better go and see Mum. Check she's OK.' His eyes narrowed. 'Better have a few words with our Dr Roley, an' all.'

'She's fine, Fitz. She went to sleep as if nothing had happened. Let her rest.'

'She's my mum, OK?' said Fitz, getting up.

Sam scrambled up too. 'Look, better than having a go at Roley, why don't you go to the police?'

By the way Fitz looked at her, Sam felt she'd just asked him to cut off his own goolies.

'No, don't think so. Better not.'

'What?' She threw up her arms. 'What's wrong with everyone round here? You can't just pretend you're not involved. Why am I the only person who seems to think this is a big deal?'

'Well, why don't you go, then?'

'I...' She trailed off. 'Well, I just can't really. I mean, I said to the Doctor... and I'm not even from...' He was looking at her as if that second head had grown back. 'Look, all I'm saying is that, if you happened to go to the police 'cause you're worried about your mum, that's a better motive than me going and dropping everyone in it when the Doctor -'

Fitz shook his head and gave her a filthy look. 'You little hypocrite!'

'I am not!' protested Sam. I'll come with you. I just thought it would be easier for you to -'

'Look, I can't go, all right?'

'Why not?'

'You tell me why you can't go!'

Sam groaned. 'All right, all right, terrific. OK, fine. I'll tell you why / can't, and you tell me why you can't, all right?'

Fitz looked shifty. 'All right.'

'And what we say is God's honest truth, yeah? So we have to believe each other no matter how weird it is.'

Fitz looked at her strangely. 'Go on, then.'

Sam blushed. 'After you.'

'OK, OK...' Fitz cleared his throat. 'I can't go to the police because they're after me. I'm wanted by the law 'cause I did a runner when they came

round this morning. Happy now?'

Sam burst in: 'I can't go to the police because the Doctor would never forgive me and because I don't belong in this time. I'm from the 1990s and they'd think I was mad. There's no record of me here 'cause I was born in 1980, see, and me and the Doctor travel through time and space together...'

Her voice trailed off, and she and Fitz just looked at each other.

'Right,' they both said in unison.

There was a very long pause.

4.6

'Will it stop me hurting?' asked Taylor, his face pale, eyes dull.

'It'll make you feel calmer, Peter,' said Roley. 'Much calmer

''I'll come, then.' With that, the big man shut his bedroom door in Roley's face.

Shaking his head, Roley walked along the corridor towards Russell's room. He'd tell the lad first, then on to the others. He was just turning the corner when Russell walked out straight in front of him.

Roley jumped. 'You startled me, Russell.'

The boy looked pale, like Taylor, almost feverish. 'Can I come to your relaxation workshop?' he asked.

'Of course, Russell, I was just coming to invite you -' Roley broke off. 'How did you know I was...?'

'Lucy and Captain Watson told me,' Russell said, as though it were obvious. "They're down in the drawing room waiting for you.'

***

Maria lay face down on her bed, crying her eyes out. In all the time she'd known Charles he'd never raised his voice to her. God knew there were times she'd wanted him to be stronger, to take control more instead of letting her organise things for him, but for him to side with that fool Doctor over her...

Well, fine. He'd soon see he was helpless without her. Practicalities and Charles Roley didn't mix. What was he going to do with that corpse down the way, for instance? It'd fall to her to do something about it in the end, she knew it.

She stopped her train of thought, realising she was more traumatised by Charles's momentary anger than she was at the violent death of a man in

her supposed care.

As she laughed, she cried some more.

***

Fitz lay on the grass and wondered just what the hell was actually happening to him. This girl just had to be a loony. Had to be.

Why couldn't he convince himself of that?

Fitz turned to Sam with just the faintest trace of a smile on his lips, then he clicked his fingers. 'I know,' he said. 'We could tell the coppers over the phone.' He peered into the distance. 'That's a police box over there, isn't it? What's that doing in Roley's grounds?'

'Oh, we, er, can't use that one.'

Fitz put his hands in his pockets. 'I suppose that's what you travel through time and space in.'

'Give the man a cigar.'

'Make it something more herbal and I think I'd take all this better.' Fitz sighed. 'Come on, then. There's a call box outside the nurseries. As long as Miss Simms doesn't catch me bunking off, we'll be laughing.'

***

The Doctor carefully placed the leech into a Petri dish daubed with Roley's blood. Then he began recalibrating the sim-cerebrum. He thought wryly of how he'd forbidden Sam anachronistic objects in this time zone, yet here he was with technology from humanity's own future - a device used to construct detailed brain analogies to test psychotropic drugs more safely.

It would be accurate enough for his purposes. The simulation would mirror the processes it had detected in Roley's brain during the mind mapping, each command from every neuron. The simulator's logic gates would substitute zeros and ones for the brain's own stimulatory and inhibitory signals, and it had a CPU instead of a biological system to interpret them,

but otherwise the computer and the brain weren't a million miles apart.

With a surgeon's skill, he connected and ran a gossamer-like web of dendritic filaments from the simulator's logic channels to the leech.

***

Sam stared at the call box. Inside was a large black box with two buttons and a heavy-looking phone.

'Button A? Button B?' she said. 'What's all that, then?'

'You do the space girl act very well,' said Fitz. 'And there was me thinking the first bird in space was that Russian tart.'

'You could try calling her a woman if you -'

***

As soon as the Doctor switched on the device, the leech twitched and curled in its bloody coating as it wasted no time interacting with the data it was receiving.

The Doctor watched it wallow in the dish.

***

Azoth thumped two hands down on the car's dashboard. 'Signal...'

'Signal?' Tarr looked at him in alarm. 'Right or left?'

***

Sam suddenly clutched at her head, and let out a piercing scream.

***

'Signal unshielded.. .'Azoth leaned forward so his bandaged head was touching the windscreen. "Turn this vehicle to the right.'

By the time Azoth had got out the words they'd missed the turning.

'Next right?' ventured Tarr, timidly.

'Follow signal!' said Azoth, his voice thick with static.

***

Fitz stared round him, wildly, not knowing what to do. 'What? What? Jesus, if I'd known you'd be that touchy about it -'

She grabbed hold of him. 'It's that feeling,' she said through gritted teeth. 'The fear, it's... he's coming back!'

'He?'

'From last night. Oh Christ...'

Fitz stood there as Sam pressed herself against him, terrified, wondering if there was anything reassuring he could say - to himself as much as to her.

'Come on,' he muttered. 'Loony or not, I think old Roley better take a look at you.'

***

Lucy and Watson were waiting for Roley in the drawing room, as Russell had said. Roley tried to smile, casually, but he knew they wouldn't be fooled. They knew he still felt a little nervous about them, he was sure of it; he had never quite managed to keep that professional distance so important between patient and doctor.

How could he expect them to trust and respect him when he didn't himself?

'Word travels fast on the grapevine I see!" he said, his tone carefully jovial. 'Dearie me, yes.'

Lucy yawned, and Watson sat down in a chair.Taylor, grim-faced and fidgety, sat next to him, and Russell helped Mrs Kreiner get comfortable on

a low-backed settee.

What's become of you all? thought Roley, surveying his charges. What's happening inside you right now, as we speak? He swallowed hard. They were only ill. Only ill.

'All here, then,' said Roley. 'Splendid.'

'Nurse Bulwell's not here,' said Lucy, a sly smile spreading over her wide round face.

'No,' said Roley. He hadn't gone to check that she was all right as the Doctor had suggested – he was too embarrassed. She'd be fine.

'I believe she's a little upset, Dr Roley,' said Watson. 'What could have caused that, do you think?'

'Oh, she's right as rain, right as rain. She's just resting. It's been a bit of a rum day so far, what with one thing and another.' He couldn't force this false grin much further.

'I'm sure I can hear her crying, Dr Roley. 'Watson looked expectantly at him, as if challenging him to disagree.

'Never mind her,' complained Taylor. 'Make us feel better.'

'Please,' added Russell. His collar was undone and his breathing was laboured.

'Right. Of course.' Roley decided this would be good therapy for himself, as much as for them. 'We'll begin.'

5.1
Russell. Confined Spaces and the Dark [1946-63]

Silence. Russell Waller was at peace.

It was quiet in here, dark, dry and quiet. The blackness was absolute. At the back of his mind Russell dreamily imagined he was under the sea, miles and miles under, floating in a warm bubble that let him breathe. He'd always wanted to go to sea.

He realised he couldn't hear Dr Roley's voice any more, telling him how relaxed he was feeling. He couldn't hear anything; maybe that was because he was underwater. There was no pressure in his ears, not like that time he'd tried to drown himself; maybe it didn't work like that when you were in the bubble. But he was under the water and his hair was floating as if it was wet, even though he was dry. If anything here had eyes that could see through the darkness, they would see his mark, see him tor what he was.

For a second he thought he was going to panic. Roley had told him to relax, that it was safe, but he'd probably told that to Austen too.And if Austen was dead - and he was sure he was, whatever Dr Roley might say - Old Nobodaddy might need another vessel to house himself in, like those big, scuttling crabs that took discarded shells for their own. In the dark, down here, he might be mistaken for something discarded. He'd tried to throw himself away so many times before, but they'd always found him in time. And he didn't want to do it now. He was earning money, he was starting to talk to people. For the first time, he'd been starting to feel better.

This was a different darkness, but it still reminded him of when he was a kid, before he was marked. The darkness had been his lot, then, familiar to him; unwelcome in the beginning, perhaps, but not threatening. His mum and dad had made him intimate with it.

They'd made out it was a game at first; his mum would tell him they were playing hide-and-seek. Dad didn't want to play many games when he came back from the war, so this was quite special. The first few times they'd said they were going to fetch his friends and see if they could find him. They'd praise him a few hours later, telling him he was so clever not to be found by

the other children, and he'd fallen for it, glowing with pride, until his friends made out they'd never gone looking for him, trying to spoil his moment of triumph. By the time he'd believed them, they'd stopped really being his friends.

And his parents started playing the game more often: they would go out and tell him they couldn't trust him to behave himself so he'd have to stay in. And soon the rules of the game had changed. To make it more fun, they found stranger, sillier places to hide him.

And so he'd been left in the dark for hours at a time, sweating, itching, bunched up in a box or a cupboard drawer, or padlocked into a suitcase. It had scared him a little at first, the constricting blackness, but he'd been able to come to an agreement with it. It would keep him safe, welcome him, hide him in return for his company. He'd almost suffocated the first few times, but after a while he'd learned to breathe slowly and shallowly, to slow himself right down. The darkness always helped, it focused him. And the spaces he was squeezed into were always too small to hide anything else except him, so it wasn't really all that scary.

When he was seven, his mum and dad had another baby. They didn't speak to Russell for weeks, kept him in the wardrobe, gave him stuff for tea every night but otherwise ignored him. It was as if the screams of the baby had blocked up their ears. He wondered if it was calling for help .The only time he'd tried that, his dad had beaten him so badly he couldn't sit down for a couple of days. He'd never tried calling for help again. He'd thought the baby very brave to shout and scream like that.

Gradually they'd come to include Russell more. He'd stopped wetting the bed; his dad had said not changing the sheets would 'learn him out of it' and he'd been right, in the end. Even the hiding game began to vary now, although the location became more predictable - the cupboard in his room or the big suitcase under the bed; he'd got too big for the smaller places, no matter how hard they squeezed.

His dad had said he would knock an hour off the time Russell spent in the dark for every bottle of pale ale he could steal from the Ox and Asses. He'd done it; done it well, too - he was never caught. But his dad was a liar. He'd stolen four bottles one summer night and his dad, after locking him up in the cupboard, had forgotten all about him. He'd stayed there till noon the

next day, almost retching on the thin, musty air, until his dad finally fetched him out and told him it was time for the stealing game again.

Things were clearly only getting worse for Russell, and for the baby too. He'd seen his mum slap it and his dad pinch it when it bravely cried for help, which never did any good. It seemed a gift from heaven when Russell was packed off to stay with his aunt in Redcar for six weeks. She didn't treat him that well, and her other children bullied him and made fun of his looks and his clothes, but the air was fresh and clear, and there were lots of open spaces. You could see them through the big windows, all the way along the wall in the lounge. Russell loved looking at the view in the daytime, and was always allowed to draw the thick curtains across when it was night.

During those weeks, Russell was made to learn more about God. His aunt seemed very close to God, and would include Him in practically every conversation she had. Russell realised that God wouldn't approve of his stealing, not even for his father. Perhaps being sent to steal was a test - he had been tempted by the promise of fewer hours in the dark, tempted to be bad. He realised now he had been weak, and that the baby, always crying for help and upsetting his parents, was weak too. If he prayed hard enough, perhaps God would give him strength.

For a few days after his return, things seemed better. But it didn't last. His mum and dad would shout, but the baby would shout still louder, and Russell was ignored again.

Early one morning, while the house slept, Russell decided to show his dad, his mum and God that he was sorry for stealing and that he was a good son. He lifted the baby, peaceful for once, and took it to his bedroom. Then he crammed both himself and the baby into the cupboard, holding the wriggling bundle tight and covering its mouth to stop it screaming. It needed to learn that shouting for help, making a fuss, was wrong. God could hear you even if you were silent.

He couldn't have been there longer than a couple of hours before his mum found them both, quiet, still and beatific in the cupboard.

For a moment he thought she'd thrown her hands over her mouth in delight and surprise that he could be so good, so understanding. But then she'd

grabbed the baby from him and gone screaming, crying round the room, pumping its little body, kissing it on the bed. But it wouldn't wake up. He'd been right. God had heard it, like he'd heard the humble Jew instead of the Pharisee.

His dad had yanked him by the hair, slapped him, hit him so hard he'd been senseless. The next thing he knew he was in the back room of Arnold Morris's, Dad's friend, the one who'd done all Dad's tattoos.

The numbers had both scratched and tickled as they'd eaten the skin on his forehead. He didn't understand his father's anger, didn't understand God and knew now that God would never understand him either.

He'd been kicked out, then, abandoned. Put in care and dumped in twenty homes round the country. He didn't really mind the moving on. With the Beast's own numbers on his forehead, it could only be a matter of time before Evil entered him. The numbers would invite it to him, haul it to him. He realised now why the darkness had been so quick to befriend him. It had known, all along, the way things would be.

It had finally happened at the seaside, on the northeast coast when he was fourteen. He'd gone into a cave, dank and smelly and dark. He'd trodden in a pool of rank sea water, looked down and believed he'd seen crystals there, bright and shiny. He'd felt shadowy angels pulling at his hair, at the skin of his shoulders, then all around him like vampire bats. He couldn't see them but he could feel them, clustering and feeding.

He'd known who had sent the things to get him, and screamed. It was perhaps the faint echo of that first scream in the darkness he could hear now... No, there was something more.A voice, speaking to him, saying his name over and over. It was Dr Roley's voice, wasn't it? It had to be. Dr Roley telling him to wake up. So why was he still down here so deep? Why couldn't he wake?

He knew that things that liked the dark could see things through it with ease. Knew that the bubble was just black resin, holding him there for scrutiny. Knew that, despite all the burning and cutting and scraping, the mark he'd been given still remained. Even here, when he was asleep. And it was still just as inviting. He'd been getting better, and they wouldn't have liked that, not at all.

The voice became clearer, and he realised it was Watson's, just as it stopped.

'Captain Watson?' Russell whispered. 'Are you there?'

He got a horrible glimpse of something fat and slug-like writhing in the blackness ahead of him. Shutting his eyes, he struggled to breathe slowly and shallowly, to befriend the darkness, to let it protect him. Russell wondered how long it would be before someone unlocked him from the dark.

5.2

Azoth threw his head back, trembling. 'Memory... Signal... Memory...'

Tarr cast furtive glances at him. 'Are you all right, Azoth?'

Azoth clearly wasn't, his limbs jerking spasmodically as if electric current were running through them. 'West,' he droned. 'We are near.' His fingers were spasming, the early-afternoon sunlight reflecting off them. 'So near.'

'Near the house?' Tarr wondered.

'Near the answers I seek.'

***

Sam was practically a dead weight in Fltz's arms by the time they reached Roley's front door. He rang on the bell. A maid he recognised, the not-bad-looking one, came to the door.

'Cynthia, isn't it?' he said.

'Samantha!' the girl cried, looking in concern at Sam.

'Funny, I could've sworn it was Cynthia,' said Fitz, helping her guide Sam into the hall and into a chair.

'I'd better tell the Doctor,' Cynthia announced.

'Wait,' said Fitz. 'Before you do, is my mum OK? Has anything weird been going on here?'

Cynthia looked at him for a moment, then started giggling. Soon she was shaking with hysterical laughter.

'I didn't think the name gag was that funny,' Fitz said.

***

Maria dabbed at her puffy eyes with a hanky. What was she getting in such a state about? She was ashamed of herself. It was shock, had to be. She'd never be acting so daft otherwise.

Charles's dreams were falling around his ears, and she'd allowed his pain and anger to drive her away from him, when it was clear he needed her by his side now more than ever.

She looked at herself in the mirror. She'd do. She'd go downstairs and carry on as normal.

God knew what normal meant, today.

***

Cynthia had meant to go to fetch the Doctor straight away, but her own room was on the way, and she'd had the urge just to pop inside for a moment.

Her old bear was on the bed, an eye missing, one arm hanging by a thread, well worn with love and the years. She walked slowly over to the bed and plonked herself down on to it, lifting the bear to her chest for comfort.

This place used to be fun. When old Mr Roley had been about he'd made it all cosy and colourful. Had an eye for the ladies, of course, but he was never nasty with it. She reckoned this Roley liked boys. Boys or wet fish.

Things hadn't been the same since old Bullface had come on the scene, wanting things all done her way. And since the nutters had moved in... No more staff, no, let her manage, her and poor Annie in the kitchen...

She'd have to leave. Find work somewhere else. God, she'd go back to her mum's if she had to – it wouldn't be for long. She looked all right, she was well presented, she was an asset. Everyone had always said so, in every household she'd been in. She'd be fine. She had to leave.

Cynthia shivered. She'd never forget the way Mrs Kreiner had talked, the way she'd moved, the look on Russell Waller's face, or the glimpse of Peter Taylor as he'd stomped off to the Restraint Room. No one would tell her what was going on, not properly, but it had to be bad. Whatever it was, it

had to be bad.

She breathed deeply, clutched the bear, closed her eyes.

She'd fetch the Doctor in a minute.

***

There was a loud banging at the door. Fitz waited for someone to appear and open it, but no one came.

He looked around, feeling a little uncomfortable, he and Sam alone in Roley's hallway. The banging at the door came again.

'You going to answer that?' called Fitz to no one in particular.

At the third lot of persistent banging Fitz was about to go and open the door when three things happened at once.

Roley emerged from down the hall, moaning to himself about his relaxation therapy being interrupted.

Sam roused herself from her torpor with an almighty shriek of terror.

Then the huge, heavy old oak door was smashed off its hinges by a man in a badly cut suit wearing bandages.

'Bloody hell!' yelled Fitz. 'We were just coming!'

With the bandaged guy was the bloke in the dark-blue coat he'd seen on the bus. He'd been followed! His first thought was that the police had found him - but then he realised that Sam was right.This was the pair from last night

And the bandaged guy had a gun. An old gun - some kind of duelling pistol, it looked like.

'Is that yours?' he hissed at Roley.

Roley had gripped Fitz's arm in fright and bafflement. 'Of course it isn't.'

'Pity. Thought he might've been returning it.'

'Zaaaaam!' said the guy in the bandages.

'I'm sorry, I think you have the wrong house,' said Fitz, politely.

Sam climbed shakily to her feet. 'And probably the wrong century.'

Fitz was impressed. She was obviously scared to death, but she was standing up to them. Well... she'd probably had more practice than he had. Whether she'd get any more at this rate was debatable, and a line of thought he didn't want to follow.

Bandage-face made a weird announcement. 'I veeeel it. The arnzwerssss eeeeear.'

'Yeah, well, anything you say.'

The guy in the coat stepped closer. Now Fitz had a dear look at him he was even more infuriatingly
familiar.

'My friend Azoth needs certain items in this building. We might kill some of you if you get in our way.' He turned to his dodgy mate, speaking as if to someone slightly deaf. 'Who do you want us to take?'

Fitz decided he wasn't waiting around for this. 'I'm off,' he whispered to Sam, as Azoth burbled electronically to the other guy.

'You're just going to walk out on us, are you?' Sam hissed back, accusingly.

'Rescuing you once was a miracle. I'm not going to push my luck.' He looked at Roley. 'Where's my mum?'

Roley looked as if he was about to go to pieces. 'I... she's... that is to say...'

'Fitz.' Sam clearly wasn't giving up. 'What about the others?'

'Screw the others!'

Sam rolled her eyes. 'You can't just go - in case you hadn't noticed he's pointing a gun at us! Look, if they're only working out what they want now, they're amateurs. If we stay together, we can take them.'

'Not likely! I'm off. And if you had any sense you'd come with me.'

'Oh really? And why's that?'

"Cause whatever else they want here, you're definitely on the list, "Zaaaaam"!'

A prim northern voice bellowed out from the landing above. 'What is the meaning of all this?'

Azoth said, 'Beeeee Gwyaaat,' or something very like it.

'Maria, get back! Run!' cried Roley, running himself back the way he had come. 'He's got a gun!

Maria ran across the landing in the same direction.

'Stop!' yelled the other guy, and Azoth fired the pistol. A large chunk of the wooden banisters went up in buckshot, but Bulwell, despite being a considerable target, was still running.

Sam seized the moment, picking up the telephone table and flinging it at Azoth. It bounced off his body with a resounding clang, but Sam was already sprinting for the table at the back of the hall. 'Before he reloads!' she yelled to Fitz. 'Help me get this over - we can use it as a barricade!'

Fitz stared, rooted to the spot. 'Sam! He's got another one!'

Sam looked up as the second gun went off. She cried out as she was hit, slammed back into the wall by the impact.

'Sam!' he yelled, and he would’ve run to her, too, if the guy in the overcoat hadn't been advancing towards him, and if his legs hadn't suddenly gone to jelly, and if he hadn't been racing away through the house though God knew where he was going...

***

Cynthia heard the gunshots. She thought about helping in some way, of maybe reaching a phone and calling the police. She could even run and fetch the Doctor, get him to help, like last time.

Instead, terrified, she hid in her wardrobe.

***

The Doctor stared in fascination at the readout screen on the cerebrum simulator. Already, the leech was subtly altering the interaction of the virtual neurons, rerouting the dendrites and axons, adding new, indeterminate matter between the synapses.As a result of all this 'rewiring', each neuron was being enhanced to the point where it could interact with over 500,000 others at the same time.

The sim-cerebrum hummed as the power charged through it. The Doctor was so engrossed in his work, he didn't hear a single thing outside the lab.

***

Maria had run for her life to the west wing, and down the other staircase from there to double back on herself. Eventually she found Charles, dithering desperately in the middle of the drawing room, with all the lunatics apparently still asleep.

'Maria!' he cried, rushing over to her and holding her. She held him, too, close and tight.

'You saved my life, warning me like that,' she said, beaming at him with joy.

'Nonsense, I just... Well...' Roley took a step back. 'Have you called the police?' he asked, hopefully.

'No! How can we?' she said, gesturing up in the vague direction of the Restraint Room.

Roley's face fell. 'How can we not? This has gone too far!' he declared.

'Help me move the others.'

Maria couldn't believe it. 'What? Leave them, come on!' She hurried over to the French windows. 'Where's the key?'

Roley shook his head. 'We are not leaving these people to helplessly await their fate. Now, help me with them.'

They tried rousing the prone bodies of their former test cases, but each was sleeping deeply, stirring uncomfortably as if having bad dreams.

'We'll have to carry them,' said Roley.

Maria had never seen him look so determined. Grimly, she hefted Watson's shoulders while Charles struggled with the man's feet.

***

Fitz ran headlong through the corridors of the house, with no idea if he was being followed or not. He should've helped Sam. He should be finding his mother. Instead he was running down corridors. Hebet Sam and the Doctor never did that.

He noticed a door with bolts on. Perhaps he could lock himself in till all this was over.

He went through the door. Then he wished he hadn't.

***

Azoth sat over Sam's limp body. He'd hit her in the shoulder, and she was bleeding. He touched the blood. Once, he'd have been able to perceive it, feel it, in context - a life force, surging through a fit body. Now it was just red fluid against the scarred metal of his hand.

He knew something of his mission now. Memories deep in his brain were being refreshed. He had lost the ability to process the learnings, to extrapolate from them and gain insight - he'd had to pass the dead people's memories on to Tarr to gain benefit from them - and so these real, proper memories were vital to him. The red fluid was definitely important, he knew

that much. Perhaps more memories would return soon. Then he would no longer have to rely on the caprices of half-blind, ancient instincts.

Then he'd know exactly what he was, and why he was here.

***

Fitz started shaking. It was no good, he couldn't stick it in here. There was blood everywhere , for God's sake. And here was his second dead body in twenty-four hours, in more of a state than the last one.

Fitz went over to the door. You couldn't even bolt it from the inside. As a plan, this had been a total disaster.

He looked round the doorway and saw the man in the blue coat walking down the corridor towards him. This isn't happening, he told himself, closing the door again.

There was nowhere to hide. But why should that weirdo think of looking in here anyway?

A few seconds passed. Then the door opened.

***

Azoth sensed he needed something from one of the rooms beyond. He scanned. Three human things were there, and something else...

He found the room, entered it, and detected that two humans were carrying a third. He advanced, ordered them to stop. The female human dropped the male they were carrying and pulled the slighter male with her through a door in the far side of the room.

He didn't need to pursue them. He wanted the one they had left behind.

***

'We left Taylor!' wailed Roley, miserably. He and Maria had decamped to his office, but now Roley was moving back towards the door. 'I will not have another death on my conscience.'

Maria thought quickly. 'But Charles, without you here to protect us, we may all of us die!'

Roley looked at her, torn between facing that thing and going back for Taylor or staying put, out of the way.

If he was honest, it wasn't really much of a choice at all.

***

Fitz curled himself up in a ball as the man with the coat stepped into the room.

'Please... Don't kill me. Oh, go on, please...' he said.

The man said nothing. Fitz looked up at him, and suddenly realised where he knew the man from. And, from the look on his face, the other man had come to a similar conclusion.

'Your surname...' Fitz's voice was as small as his chances of getting out of this alive. 'It's Tarr, isn't it?'

The man nodded. 'Yes,' he said, simply. Then he turned his attention to the corpse on the couch, lifting it up, struggling slightly under its weight.

His objective apparently achieved, and with a final look at Fitz, Tarr left the room with the man's dead body.

'Thanks for tidying up,' called Fitz, weakly, slumping back on to the floor with near hysterical relief.

***

'Quickly,' said Azoth when he saw Tarr approaching with the corpse he had felt was here. 'We must get that in the vehicle.'

'Where's Sam Jones?' asked Tarr.

'I have placed her in the vehicle, with another human.'

'But that'll make four bodies in the back!' Tarr sighed. 'I wish you'd keep me better informed. We could have killed someone with a larger

***

Even when she heard the sound of a car roaring away from the house, Cynthia stayed in the wardrobe, clutching her bear.

She didn't want to come out, ever.

5.3

Roley peeped round the splintered door frame that led out from the drawing room into the passageway to the hall. All was quiet. Though he strained to hear the slightest sound in the silence. it seemed the intruders were gone. He was aware Maria had come into the room behind him. Her being there made him feel more confident, and he walked out into the passageway. Then, holding his breath, he entered the hall.

It was a mess. The door was shattered, his table was overturned, a chair lay on its side, and an almighty chunk had been taken out of his banisters. Of Fitz and Sam, there was no sign.

'Have I missed something?'

The Doctor had suddenly appeared, standing at the top of the stairs, fixing him with those alarming, piercing eyes of his. 'My machinery's terribly noisy.'

Roley stared back at him. 'You mean... you missed all that...?'

'All what?'

'Crikey Moses, man, where've you been, the moon?'

The Doctor nodded, his voice perfectly serious. 'Yes. Once or twice.' Then he noticed the banisters, and his flippancy was forgotten in an instant. He frowned. 'Where's Sam?'

***

Sam remembered her journey to Azoth's lair only in snatches. She came to first in a stuffy car, her arm killing her. She thought she must've fallen off the back seat because she was down in the footwells. She caught a glimpse of Azoth, sitting in the passenger seat, silent. Then a bloodied arm fell across her face. From the stained white sleeve she guessed it had to be Austen. She didn't want to look up and see what else was on the back seat, so she shut her eyes.

The next thing she remembered she was being carried through somewhere dark, tunnels or something. Her arm still felt as if it were on fire. She was reminded of being blasted on Janus Prime. Same bloody shoulder... She'd thought about saying something as whoever was carrying her swung her through the chill caverns, but wanted it to be something clever. She must have passed out again before anything came to mind. Typical.

Now she was on a couch in a well-lit room, staring up at the ceiling. She was surprised there was no strip lighting there, as it was that kind of brightness. Did they have strip lights in 1963? Then she glanced around and realised this place was a teeny bit more anachronistic than her rape alarm. Shouldn't be allowed.

The room was clustered with crystals, glowing feverishly - prettier than strip lights, so that was something. Pale-grey banks of equipment lined the walls, looking hi-tech through their minimalism, small lights would occasionally light to suggest the machinery was working, and a hum of power not dissimilar to the TARDIS's own could be heard.

She tried to sit up, then realised she was being restrained. Force clamps or something, she reckoned, for there was nothing obvious holding her body in place.

Ahead of her was a large workbench lined with more of the grey machines and units. Vaguely, she became aware of the smell of rotten eggs, and wondered if it was her. She ought to be pretty frightened, after all.

Her arm had stopped hurting and she realised she was probably drugged. She felt a flash of irritation: her body was supposed to be a temple, that was what she'd always told herself, and yet it seemed to end up ransacked so often...

Azoth's mate appeared in view, a skinny man with a thin face and a long, straight nose. He had a beard and straggly hair, and was smiling.

It took a while for Sam's mouth to start working. Her throat felt terribly dry. 'Who are you?' she managed to ask.

'I am Neville Fitzwilliam Tarr.'

'Very grand. Where are we?'

'In our secret underground base,' said Tarr. Sam doubted that was original, even in 1963.

'What do you want? Why have you brought me here?'

'Because we're going to do things to you. 'Tarr said.

***

The Doctor had organised a search of the house to round up everyone and to get them all together in the sitting room. Roley had found Fitz flat on his back in Dreamland - with quite a tale to tell - while the Doctor had found Cynthia in shock, curled up in her wardrobe. Sam was nowhere to be seen, and the Doctor had to concur with Roley that she'd been snatched along with Peter Taylor and Austen's body.

'At least we've got rid of one of our problems,' said Maria, pouring sherry into a glass for Cynthia.

'I'm sorry?' asked the Doctor, distantly.

'That corpse. Well, it's one less thing to worry about, isn't it?'

The Doctor angrily opened his mouth to reply, then seemed to decide there was little point.

Roley looked at Lucy, Watson and Russell, all sitting on a couch together, saying nothing. It had been a few minutes now since they had awoken to the news that Taylor had been taken away. None of them seemed particularly surprised, but Watson in particular was disappointed; strange, thought Roley, the two of them had never particularly hit it off. Taylor hadn't hit it off with anyone.

Russell was looking nervously around, particularly at Watson, as if afraid he was about to be told off or beaten. He was a sensitive lad, and had taken some time to emerge from the sleep Roley had induced. He had no idea how he'd put them under so deeply so quickly, and once again was doubting his abilities to do anyone good. There was a slightly grey pallor to

their skin, now, while the whites of their eyes were... well, they were just a little too bright, if anything. Mrs Kreiner was the same, sitting with Fitz on the couch next to them. Fitz held his arm around her, and she was squeezing his hand tightly.

To Roley's surprise, Mrs Kreiner suddenly piped up: 'What's happening to us, Doctor?'

He opened his mouth to reply, then realised she was talking to the Doctor, not to him. He was crestfallen for a moment, but knew he couldn't really blame her.

'Nothing's happening to us, 'Watson said.

'I'm afraid that's not true,' said the Doctor.

'Nonsense, man.'

'Please,' the Doctor said, 'I think you should hear me out.'

Watson stood up. 'I tell you, nothing's happening to us. We're fine, all of us, never better.'

Lucy and Russell looked at him, but Mrs Kreiner continued to look at the Doctor.

'The people that came here today took Taylor and Austen away for a reason,' said the Doctor. "They took my friend Sam, too.'

'Well, they never took us, did they?' said Watson. 'Now, I'm going to my room.'

'I believe they came here today because of certain things that are happening to all of you,' said the Doctor, his voice rising a fraction.

'Who's coming with me?'Watson continued, ignoring him.

After a couple of moments, Lucy stood up. 'I'm tired.' She yawned, noisily, as if to prove the point. 'I'm going to lie down.'

'Russell?' asked Watson.

The boy stared ahead, not looking at him. 'No.'

Watson tried again elsewhere, polite and calm. 'Mrs Kreiner. May I escort you to your room?'

'No, you may not,' said Fitz, slipping his arm round her more tightly.

'Very well. I dare say I'll see you all later.' He turned again to Russell. 'If you ever need to chat, boy, you come and find me, won't you?' he said. With a last glance at the Doctor, he left the room, Lucy close behind him. Roley felt thoroughly ignored once again.

The Doctor smiled warmly at Cynthia, who still seemed to be in shock, and walked over to Mrs Kreiner and Fitz.

"This man...' said the Doctor. 'You said his name was Tarr.'

'My maiden name,' said Mrs Kreiner, smiling.

'He looked like my granddad. I've seen pictures of him when he was a younger man, and this guy...' Fitz scoffed. 'But how can that be, anyway? Granddad was an only child and he's six feet under in Highgate Cemetery.'

Mrs Kreiner nodded dolefully.

The Doctor looked at Roley. 'And you say the other man was carrying duelling pistols?'

'Yes, early nineteenth century by the look of them.'

'You're sure?' the Doctor demanded.

'Well, I'm no expert...'

"That's the same time Captain Watson went back to,' said Maria, slowly. 'Remember?'

Mrs Kreiner spoke up again. 'Your great-granddad's dad would've been

around then, Fitzie. Him and his brother. Freddie and Neville, they went everywhere together.'

'Brother...' Roley said aloud. Everyone looked at him. 'It's probably nothing, but when we hypnotised Watson he mentioned his brother in 1820. An identical twin, a soldier, I believe...'

'You're right,' said Fitz. 'It's probably nothing.'

'No, wait,' said the Doctor, concentrating. 'Wait, wait, wait...' He turned to Mrs Kreiner as if about to ask a question, but she answered him before he could speak, nodding.

'Freddie and Neville were identical, too, in every way,' said Mrs Kreiner. "Then Neville died. It's all in the scrapbook - it's a pity I can't show you.' She looked suddenly glum. 'I wish I was back home.'

'It's all coincidence,' protested Fitz. 'Surely?'

'No. Anything but,' said the Doctor, leaping to his feet. 'Of course, of course...'

Roley nodded gravely. 'Doctor, it's their DNA, isn't it?'

'Precisely!' cried the Doctor. 'Identical twins share the same genetic information. No need to waste time duplicating DNA testings.'

'What about you, Russell?' asked Roley. 'Did your great-grandfather's father -?'

Russell put his head in his hands. 'I don't know anything about any of that.'

Roley knelt down by Mrs Kreiner. 'You say... Neville died?'

'That's what they said. Went missing. Caused quite a hoo-hah.'

Fitz butted in. 'Yeah, right. He went missing until this very day when he turns up large as life in West Wycombe to bag himself a corpse.'

'Doctor?' asked Roley, expectantly.

'If you're carrying out experimental research, chances are you'll want a control group to compare against.'

'What, like you did with our blood?' asked Maria.

'Exactly. And if you need results but haven't perfected your methods...'The Doctor shook his head, sadly. 'Two heads are better than one.'

Russell scowled. 'What are you all talking about?'

The Doctor stood in the middle of the room, all eyes on him. 'We know that mental illness is caused by malfunctioning neurotransmitters, yes?'

Roley nodded. 'Signals being sent out and misinterpreted, the suppression or overproduction of certain chemicals in the brain...'

'Quite. But what if the mental illness in these poor people is the result of a technical fault?'

Everyone stared at him.

'What are you talking about?' spluttered Roley.

'What if it's the accidental result of a program of some kind. One designed not to run on a mechanical computer, but on the human brain.'

There was a long silence.

'Well, you lost me,' said Fitz.

The Doctor turned to Roley. "That leech thing has been terribly busy trying to upgrade your simulated neural net.'

'Upgrade it? For heaven's sake, man.

The Doctor raised a finger to his lips, then carried on. 'I believe the leech has been designed to interact with the human brain to enable a program to function - the same program that was originally engendered into a select group of minds back in the nineteenth century...'

'In the cave,' Roley breathed.

'Quite possibly. But it didn't work. And, with the genetic transfer of this program from generation to generation, it's become more and more corrupted.'

'Corrupted?' asked Mrs Kreiner. 'You mean in the way the devil corrupts?'

The Doctor smiled, awkwardly. 'That wasn't my precise meaning, Mrs Kreiner, but...'

'It's interesting though, isn't it,' said Roley. 'Why make these people believe they're possessed by the devil, Doctor?'

'I doubt it was intentional. I imagine it's down to something in the rerouting of their unconscious mind, as you suspected. Perhaps hell is the closest analogy they can find to express the program's true purpose.'

'But it seems so bizarre!' protested Roley. 'I know the brain can be compared to a computer in many ways, but if we're talking about this program being some kind of algorithmic instruction or whatever...'

'Computers are capable of far more than simple arithmetic, Dr Roley.'

'So what is the function of this program?' Roley asked.

'I don't know. I just don't know. 'Abruptly, the Doctor clapped his hands and rubbed them briskly together. 'Still, life would be dull as ditchwater if we all knew everything. Now if you'll excuse me, I've really got to rescue Sam.'

He left the room without another word.

***

'Have you been in my head since you jumped me in the alley?' Sam asked, feeling stronger now.

'Only a trace,' said Azoth.

'He didn't have the time to take all your mind,' explained Tarr.'So he passed on the bits he did get to me. Lucky for us the fresh bits come first.'

Sam shivered. 'You saw the house in my mind, then.'

Azoth nodded. 'I sensed a force had gathered. One important to my purpose,' he drawled in his bizarre voice.

'And what is your purpose?'

Azoth ignored the question. Sam got the feeling he didn't quite know himself. 'You showed us where the force was housed.'

'In a house!' said Sam. 'Neat.'

Tarr ignored her, too. 'And, when we were close enough to you, Azoth could see the things you've seen since.'

'How?'

Tarr smiled, proudly. 'He's really very clever. He's my best friend.'

A nutter, decided Sam. Why doesn't that surprise me. 'He's probably tuned in to my brainwaves or something,' she said, keeping her voice casual. 'He rootled about in my head, and that tipped me off he was coming.'

'She has high intelligence,' observed Azoth, his voice all over the shop.

'Thank you,' she said.'I do elocution too, if you're interested. Repeat after me:"The rain in..." Her voice tailed off. 'Oh God. What is that thing?'

Azoth was holding a perspex cube with a fat black lump in it, like the one Austen had been carrying, only far larger.

'It generates a program, 'Azoth said, haltingly, almost as if it were a question.

'We saw that corpse in your mind,' said Tarr. 'Comparing it to the body of Peter Taylor, we know what it is that has been removed:

'You've got him here, too?'

'Yes. He got violent when he woke up, though. We had to put him to sleep.'

Sam wondered if that was a euphemism, but somehow she doubted it. This guy was as blunt as a baseball bat.

'Azoth's so pleased to find all this out. He'd forgotten it, you see. You roused him.'

'I'm overwhelmed; said Sam.

'Your DNA is special. He's very sensitive to DNA, is Azoth, and yours stands out round here.'

His words seemed to insert a flash-frame of herself into her racing thoughts. She had dark hair and a whole different life, sitting in a bedsit eating hamburgers on a rainy day. With an effort, she blinked that daydream away. They were just talking about some side effect of travelling in the TARDIS, that was all. Time travel was enough to give anyone 'special' DNA, surely?

Tarr was still speaking:'.. .gives Azoth all sorts of hopes for getting more good results from you.'

'Results?' asked Sam.

Tarr's tone became more confidential. 'I'm not sure what he means myself,' he said, as if indulging a child. 'He won't tell me! Wants it to be a surprise, I think.'

Azoth placed the box on a glowing yellow dais. Soon, a black glob pared itself off from the main lump. It looked exactly like the leech that had been in Austen.

Sam swallowed hard as Azoth took the leech out of the box. A tiny thread of light seemed to be connecting it to the blob in the box, which had begun to pulsate.

'The Benelisa program is running. 'Azoth announced.

'Benelisa? What's that?' Sam wanted to know.

'I... am uncertain.'

Tarr smiled sympathetically. 'His memory isn't very good.'

He obviously remembered how to make the thing work, though. The black thing wriggled as if in anticipation.

'Don't you want to know why I don't belong, how I got here?' Sam yelled, trying to stall them.

'No,' said Tarr, simply. 'You are here now. That's the important thing.'

She felt like a guest being indulged for turning up hours late for a party. She squirmed in horror as the leech was held out to the side of her head. It's going to be like in the Star Trek movie, she thought, panicking. It's going to crawl in my ear!

5.4

The Doctor stared down in confusion at a small readout screen on the TARDIS console. He was scanning for any anachronistic energy readings nearby, but all he was getting was a kind of blanket emission from all over London. He banged his fist on the monitor's housing but the effect refused to transfigure itself into something more sensible. He frowned. Either the TARDIS was acting up again, or something very peculiar was going on.

***

Roley stood alone in the hallway, hands thrust deep in his trouser pockets. The Doctor had vanished, just like that. He'd wanted nothing more this morning, but now...

He shuddered at the sight of the shattered doorway. A rectangle of lawn and warm blue sky mocked him with its calm. As Roley walked forward for a breath of fresh air, the Doctor burst through the doorway, sending him skittering backward with a cry of alarm.

'You weren't planning to go out in your car, were you?' asked the Doctor, his face serious.

'No, but -'

'Splendid. Then lend me your keys.'

Roley found himself crossing to the key hooks on the wall like an obedient dog. With a flash of irritation he turned back to the Doctor. 'Look, I really think...' He tailed off. 'What's that you're holding?'

'What, this?' The Doctor looked quizzically at the device in his hand as if unsure of its purpose himself. It looked a little like a telephone receiver with a small screen attached.

'Is it to help you find Sam?' asked Roley.

The Doctor nodded. 'Indeed. I'm hoping it can lead me straight to the lion's den.'

'But they could be anywhere.'

'Sam recognised them from last night in town. Fitz saw one of them from his bus. I'd say they were local boys.'

Roley nodded, gloomily, and went to fetch his keys. 'Don't you have your own transport?'

The Doctor thought for a moment, then shook his head. 'I'm going to be nipping about all over the place by the looks of things. Ill need something more conventional - I don't want to be too conspicuous.'

'And you want to take a Rolls-Royce?'

'Trust me.'

Roley handed over a set of keys on a leather fob. 'But what if something happens?'

'You're insured, aren't you?'

Roley pinched the bridge of his nose. 'I mean, while you're away!' He sighed. 'I've brought this down on all of us, haven't I? You warned me but I wouldn't listen, I kept -'

'Lessons like that can only be learned the hard way,' said the Doctor, sympathetic for once.

'But what happens now?' Roley knew he must sound pathetic, he couldn't help it. 'Where do I go from here?'

'Back to the drawing room for tea and scones?' Roley didn't smile, and the Doctor became more serious. 'You must act normally, Dr Roley. Make sure everyone stays calm, until I get back.' He thought for a moment. ‘Remember: Watson, the others - none of them have done anything wrong deliberately.'

'Watson, yes... You've singled him out, and you're right,' wittered Roley. 'It's as if he's become their spokesman or something.'

'Like I say. Keep everyone calm,' said the Doctor. I'll find Sam, where they're holding Taylor, and hopefully discover what they're doing here in the first place.'

With that, he climbed through the splintered door and left Roley alone again in the hall, wondering what he'd do if the Doctor didn't come back.

***

Lucy watched herself in the mirror, her eyes darting about over the image of her face. Every time she blinked, for a split second, she fancied she could see Davydd standing behind her, watching her.

She'd been right, she knew it. He would be the last. He wanted her, and she would give herself to him, take the evil into herself one last time. She'd been taught it wasn't right, that she should stop. That she could stop. She remembered the doctor who had told her all that, the one who'd shopped her, who'd said enough was enough and got her the Help. And it had helped, for a little while, helped the loneliness she'd always felt. Since coming here, since knowing Davydd and wondering about him, the loneliness had become almost more than she could bear.

But it could never be so easy as to do it once more and stop for ever. She had feelings for him. That had never happened before, and she felt it to be wrong. After all she had done, to feel this way... This way about him .

It was her last temptation. Davydd was strong, and getting stronger. He'd even told her she was beautiful, unbidden. He'd lain with her, close, not trying to take her, just holding and being held, as if that was enough. He'd shown her he was strong, how he'd gained freedom from the dead feeling that he knew ruled over her, too.

It had sat in her stomach most of her life. Deadness, unleavened promise, mouldering inside her. She was barren, it had been decreed, the doctors had decided. Too many bad angels crushed up inside her... It was their spirits, she felt, that weighed her down still.

She'd remained a child herself in so many ways, as if she'd known she would never have one of her own. And a child should trust, she told herself.

Trust in what was right. And if that was unclear, for whatever reason, well, maybe just in what felt right.

The brightness of her eyes made her head hurt. She didn't know what was right any more, and it was too tiring to try to work it all out. She only knew she had to feel stronger.

She put on make-up to bring colour to her greying face, then went to Davydd's room. She knew judgement was looming.

But it didn't matter what you did in this life. It was the life after that was important.

***

The Doctor drove through the streets of London, in another time, another body, he might well have appreciated driving in such an enjoyably primitive machine. If only he'd built interchangeable plates into the Bug he could've taken that; mind you, his road tax wouldn't be valid for nearly forty years.

He cursed. Faint energy emissions were registering, but every time he got a fix on them, they shifted. Now he'd gone down a dead end.

He shifted the Rolls into reverse and sped backwards the way he'd come.

***

Sam was lost. The pain was over but only because it had passed into something more profound than that, a deeper agony she guessed she didn't have senses well-developed enough to fully comprehend. It was just a vast disquieting presence that filled her like water, stopping any other sensation from registering.

Her sight was being restored in little splashes of colour. It was like looking at an old green-and-red 3-D picture with pinholes in the glasses, everything blurring, perspectives shifting. She felt she'd been there for ever. Her memories, her thoughts, they all told her that her head was working, that everything was functioning as it should. It was just her body that wasn't quite keeping up. This new feeling had taken its place, had tried to insinuate itself into normality, borrowing her eyes to do so.

Gradually, the speckles of light began to resolve themselves into monochrome, static-flecked images. It was as if she were watching an image fed from a security camera on a monitor that kept jumping, rolling, changing perspective. She thought it was the shadow of a man.

Then, as if someone had flicked a switch, colour bled into the image. She was still in Azoth's crystallised base, and Tarr was still standing there. The revelation was something of a disappointment after all that.

Then gradually, in colours she'd never even imagined, shapes began to appear all over him, as if superimposed. Dark, fuzzy, each about the size of a joint of meat... They seemed to be growing out of the air, fleshy little hoover bags attached to his skin by their spindly nozzle-mouths. Two small horns protruded either side of a range of big, bleary compound eyes. They were clustered all over him. She looked down, and, after a couple of seconds, saw that she was covered in the creatures too. Suckling, greedily. Not a single inch of her was clear of them.

***

Azoth turned to Tarr as Sam screamed and screamed, and nodded as if in thought.

'Seems to be doing something, 'Tarr observed.

Sam's scream grew still louder, then fell to a whimper.

'Her sight seems affected,' said Azoth. 'I must know what she can see. Locate the choroid processor.'

'Right,' said Tarr, taking a step forward then stopping. 'What does that look like, then?'

***

Roley wandered back into the drawing room, having made himself a cheese sandwich in the kitchen. He couldn't remember the last time he'd done something like that for himself .Thick hunks of white bread, Cheddar cheese and chutney, absolutely delicious. For a few moments, he'd felt like

a young man again. He'd even considered breaking out something a little special from his cellar, but had worried that might be seen as bad form, given the circumstances.

Only Maria remained in the room. The sherry had gone down quite a way. He looked at her, frowning slightly, and she smiled.

'I'd have made dial for you,' she said.

'It's all right. I wanted to do it myself. 'A thought struck him. 'Sony, rude of me not to offer.'

Maria snuggled back into the chair. 'Oh, come on now... No apologies. We know each other too well, don't we?'

Roley smiled, weakly. 'Where are the others?'

Maria put a finger to her lips as she frowned exaggeratedly in thought. 'Cynthia's gone for a walk in the grounds with the Krauts...'

'Really, Maria,' said Roley, becoming a little irritated.

'And little Russell's gone up to his room. Said he wanted to leave.'

Roley's stomach lurched. 'He hasn't left, has he?'

'Where would he go?' she scoffed. 'Back inside?'

'How much of that have you had?' asked Roley, lifting the decanter.

'What are you implying, Charles Roley?' she demanded with what he guessed was mock severity. 'Never touch the stuff. Well, not much. Not often.' She sniggered. 'And I'm still in full possession of my faculties, thank you very much.'

'It's the faculties Watson and the others might possess that worry me,' said Roley, sighing, flopping into the chair next to her. 'The ones I helped to unleash.'

'The devil finds work for idle hands to do,' said Maria, flatly.

'It's over, isn't it?' he said. 'All over. Dear me, what a mess. Where can we go from here?'

Maria got up and sat on the arm of his chair. 'I'm not going to let you sit here and stew in it all alone, Charles Roley. We'll be all right.'

'Will we?'

'Of course we will. You just wait.'

Roley placed his sandwich on the table, untouched, pouring a glass of sherry for himself instead. He drank it down and closed his eyes. He wasn't a young man any more: he was old, fading. Falling, all the way down.

'Promise?'

Maria slid down the side of the chair, pressing herself against him. He didn't protest. He thought of his mother, of cuddling up to her when he was small. He wanted to believe her.

'I promise, my love, I promise.'

***

Lucy stood outside Watson's door, still wondering what she should do. Then she heard him softly call
her name, although the door was still closed.

'I'm here,' she said, opening the door and walking through, deciding to brazen it out. 'That's a good trick of yours.'

He smiled. 'Would you like me to show you how to do it?' Lucy shrugged. 'What would you like most of all, in all the world?' Davydd asked.

Lucy shook her head. 'Lots of things. Things that could never be mine.'

'Why?'

'Because the world doesn't work like that.'

'We need a new world, then.' He smiled. 'And a different sky to cover it.'

Her heart seemed to freeze. He knew everything, everything about her. Every hope and dream, she was sure, everything.

He was just looking at her, still smiling faintly. She closed her eyes. He knew her, fully. It was be who would judge her.

'What's happening to me?' Lucy felt her voice starting to squeak in her throat.

'You are being reborn. A second chance.'

'I can't be. I don't deserve that.'

'You don't deserve to feel new?'

'No. I am lost, fallen.'

'We have all of us fallen, Lucy,' Davydd said. 'Like apples from a tree. Things crawl inside us and we begin to rot.' He smiled, kissed her fully on the lips. Still she didn't open her eyes. 'But our fall has been well guided. And now we rise, don't we? Now! Can take you higher. Ever higher.'

Lucy looked at him now, wide-eyed and hopeful, almost too afraid to ask. 'And I you?'

He kissed her again. 'Oh, yes...' His hands slipped round her waist. 'It makes sense to me now, you see. All those despairing times, those many, many times... All along we were being groomed for strength. For power.'

Lucy nodded, a wide, silly smile, as if she were drunk. She felt it stretching her face. 'Waiting for a new sky to form through the window.'

'New,' agreed Davydd. 'Untainted by pain, or loss, or regret.' His own smile was cold. '"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."'

Lucy nodded. She felt weak beside him. It would feel so good to be strong. Every scintilla of strength they'd bled out of her in sanitariums and hospitals

- dumped in with lunatics, drunks and halfwits - he'd found again, had gathered it up, had it to offer her.

There was no decision to be taken here.

5.5

All you got was hassle. Martha Wynshaw was sick of changing beds, sick of dishpan hands, and sick to death of her boss telling her she didn't do any of it well enough. It wasn't like it was the Dorchester, was it? Some filthy little guest house off Piccadilly where if you rented a room for more than an hour you were a higher class of customer.

So, when the Rolls-Royce pulled up beside her in the busy street and a nice-looking man with light-brown curls poked his head out the car window, she almost walked straight past. It would only be hassle.

'Excuse me! Can you drive?'

There was something in his tone that made her turn round. He was looking at her hopefully.

'What?'

'I need to ask a bit of a favour.'

Weirdo or creep, one of the two. 'Sorry, mate, I'm busy.'

'Oh, please!' He'd got out the car, and her suspicions deepened. He was dressed all fancy, wearing a long, green, velvet coat, waistcoat and grey trousers, and holding a funny-looking object. What was she hanging around for?

'Would you mind sitting in my car?'

That was it. 'How dare you?' she began in disbelief.

'Only I've just got to go off somewhere,' he continued. Suddenly, he looked at her, earnestly. 'I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important.'

His eyes were pale blue, sad-looking. They were beautiful eyes. 'What do you want me to do?' she said, more softly.

'I can't find anywhere to park and I don't want to get a ticket. I was

wondering if you'd mind car-sitting, and, if a traffic warden comes, driving it round the block for me.'

She stared at the keys he was dangling in front of her. 'But...'

'I'll try not to be too long,' he said.

'But that's a Rolls-Royce,' she managed.

'Very true,' he agreed, amiably.

'But I haven't driven for years! My first husband, he -'

'Watch out for second gear,' he called back as he disappeared into the crowds of shoppers. 'It sticks a little.'
With that, the strange man was gone.

Martha Wynshaw opened the car door, looking round her, expecting someone to run out and laugh in her face at any moment. Nothing. She eased herself into the sumptuously upholstered driver's seat and stared at the walnut dashboard, at the dials and meters it housed."His key was real - it fitted in the ignition, it even turned. It was true -engines could purr like a kitten.

The man had definitely gone, as quickly as he'd arrived. He was probably a nutter. He'd probably stolen it...

No. No, they weren't a thief's eyes...

She checked her own in the rear-view mirror.

She could drive off and never come back. Stop outside her second husband's house and flick Vs at him and his new missus. Visit her first husband and honk the horn at his grave. The tank was almost full!
She could go for miles!

She remembered those eyes that weren't thief's eyes, turned off the engine, and sighed. Typical, she thought as she sank back into the seat.

All you got was hassle.

***

The choroid processor interfaced directly with the vestiges of Azoth's nerve endings, connected via the leech to Sam's optic nerve. Sam was looking at Tarr, and Azoth duly received the impression of the man, though his outline seemed distorted, shrouded by something greater.

This was wrong. There should be nothing to see. Azoth felt something stir deep inside his head. It wasn't anything so clinical as data. This was memory .

***

Cynthia trudged along next to Fitz as they walked all round the grounds, stopping now and then to let his mum have a rest. The old woman seemed so ordinary now. It was hard to believe that earlier that day she'd been snarling, swearing, attacking that poor girl, Sam.

Cynthia was gradually feeling better. Out here, everything seemed so normal. The sky was a clear blue, birds were singing, it was a day tailor-made for picnics, weddings and fresh starts. Mad old women and men with guns had no place in a day like this.

No more delays. She wouldn't even give Roley notice - she'd leave straight away. What could he do about it, anyway - dock her wages? She didn't care. Loonies like that old biddy had turned the whole place into a madhouse.

'I'm going back, now,' she announced.

Fitz looked at her. 'Oh, don't go,' he said. 'Safety in numbers, and all that.'

'No, I'd better. Not feeling too well.' She looked at Mrs Kreiner, who was rubbing her stomach as if it was sore. 'She's looking a bit peaky, too.'

'I'm all right, dear,' said the old girl in that funny low voice of hers. It used to make her smile, but now it just made her shiver. She had to go.

Without another word, she did.

***

Azoth moved out of the control area and through to the back of his cavern. The light was a little dimmer here, the holographic sky darkening to ochre with the onset of nightfall. Brittle crystal crunched beneath his feet. Tarr never went here - humans would cease to function in minutes with the cold. There were bodies frozen here, twenty or so, packed into crystalline healing caskets and covered in fine filaments and electrodes. Azoth knew it was wrong to awaken them: it violated his long-forgotten purpose. He was the custodian of these sleeping bodies.

Benelisa program . The name had risen unbidden from his ancient brain when the black matter had been detected in Peter Taylor. Now it struggled for further recognition from deep in his damaged memory core.

Azoth wiped frost from the data displays above each casket and read. Only the one on the end was empty: TARR UNIT B, 1827.Tarr had been awakened in an effort to ascertain why he was nurturing any of the humans at all, but he had been unable to offer much by way of explanation: Azoth could deduce only that the people in the caskets were awaiting the signal that would mark the conclusion of the experiments they had been subjected to, over 130 years ago. Azoth moved on down the line. WATSON UNIT B, 1827.TAYLOR UNIT B, 1829.

Taylor. That was the name of the other human they had brought from the house, the one secured in the antechamber. Here was a significant link. Surely now he bordered on understanding his true function.

He caught sight of the bronze, featureless globe of his face in the icy crystal of one of the caskets, and remembered it was once disguised with flesh. Flesh suffused with blood like that from Sam's wound to keep it fresh and clinging. Something had occurred. Something long ago. He was so old, now...

Tarr was calling to him, accusing him of ignoring him, of never telling him what was going on. Well, why should he? He looked at his frosted image once more, felt an image taken from Sam's mind engage with a thought of his own. Did a lab worker explain to his rats what was to happen to them?

He stalked back into the main control cavern. 'Release her,' he said.

Tarr looked blankly at him. 'Why?'

'She should not see them, but she does. Take her to the surface,' he droned. 'I must ascertain the extent of the infestation."

'I really don't know what you're talking about these days,' fussed Tarr.

'Do it.' Azoth stalked away. This human was tiresome. It shouldn't be here. He needed to understand why things were as they were. The information was there, locked inside himself, he felt it. All he needed was the right key.

'Take her to the surface. Note what she sees and return.'

With that, Azoth returned to the far end of the cave. A few seconds later he heard the clanging of the exit doors closing.

He knew he was acting contrary to his programming, but his instincts, the only part of him still functioning even with partial clarity, compelled him to act regardless. He activated a sequence of buttons on the storage canister that held Taylor unit B.

***

Lucy rolled over and stretched luxuriously. Davydd was right. Things were just going to get better and better. Suddenly she found she couldn't stop giggling.

'Shh,' said Davydd.

'I can't!' she laughed, turning and wrapping her arms round him. 'I've never felt so happy. Not ever.'

He looked at her. His face seemed more gaunt than it had been, the greyness of his skin becoming more pronounced. But he was a fine man, a fine man...

He smiled, that same thin, cold smile as before. She giggled some more despite it. Maybe because of it, she couldn't tell.

'They do say laughter is contagious,' he said.

She laughed louder. Her stomach felt warm and full, as though it had a hundred hearty breakfasts in it.

'Concentrate,' he whispered. 'See if it works.'

***

Roley was feeling uncomfortable. He'd let his weakness overtake him, greedy for comfort of any kind. Now, Maria had dozed off while holding him, snoring softly. Every time he tried to move she seemed to wind herself tighter around him. Someone would come in, soon. Young Russell, or the Kreiners and Cynthia. What would they think? He was the still the man of the house, after all, still meant to be in control. It wouldn't do to be found in a compromising position.

Suddenly, Maria started chuckling to herself, little high-pitched titters in her sleep. Just how much had she had? wondered Roley. Then it got louder, earthier, until she woke herself up. She stared around her in surprise, then found herself laughing even more.

'What's so funny?' asked Roley, trying to wriggle free.

***

'Don't be so boring,' said Lucy, still laughing, as Davydd tried to pull free.

With a broad smile, he slapped her across the face, and she fell back on the bed.

***

Maria stopped laughing, staring up at Charles in disbelief. 'You hit me.'

Roley stood there, staring first at her, then at his hand. Then a shudder seemed to go through him as words seemed to force their way out of his mouth. 'I'm - just - warming up,' he said.

***

Lucy smiled. 'Oh, I see...'

She knelt up on the bed, draped her arms round him and kissed him hard on the mouth.

***

'Maria!' Roley managed to gasp through a mouthful of her sherry-tasting tongue. 'What the devil do you think you're doing?'

She recoiled, suddenly, seeming to come to her senses, backing away in horror.

'I'm sorry, Charles, I'm so sorry, please don't be angry with me, please...'

He left the room, furiously wiping his mouth.

***

'No...' said Watson, as Lucy raked her fingernails down his back. 'No, we've lost them.'

She backed off, demurely. 'It worked, though, didn't it? We bad them!'

He smiled at her.'Yes. We had them. And it's going to get better.'

'Like we have,' said Lucy, grinning. Let any of those narrow-minded, petty nags who had dogged her all her life dare say she was ill now. She walked over to the window, where the sun was shining through a chink in the net curtains. 'I don't suppose Jesus will want me for a sunbeam any more, will he?'

'Forget Jesus,' Watson said. 'He's nothing. We're going to show people some real miracles.'

Lucy smiled again, pulling the white lace aside from the window. It felt wanton to have the sun on her skin. 'We could do anything on a day like this.'

He nodded at the door, and it opened. 'The four of us could do even more.' Then he considered for a moment. 'And if we numbered five ...'

***

Sam winced. Tarr was dragging her along by the scruff of her neck through the tunnels, hurting her - but the pain was helping her concentrate. Her mind was learning to accommodate this new faculty – it was hurting less and she was becoming less conscious of it. Even so, she was glad it was dark in here. She could still make out the creatures on herself, and on Tarr, too, so she resolved only to look dead ahead. That kept the blurry superimpositions at bay.

It was weird; while it was freaky, frightening now, she could imagine it feeling as natural as breathing eventually, seeing things in this way. She hated to think what the consequences of that would be for her poor brain.

Tarr propelled her roughly towards a kind of ladder, one seemingly made of crystal, leading up a kind of chimney affair that was dark and narrow. She couldn't see any trace of light up there, and wondered where it would lead her.

'Climb,' he ordered.

'Just because he treats you like his hired help, there's no need to take it out on me,' Sam said. 'Some friend you've got, there. Is he always like that?'

'It's only since you came along,' said Tarr, scowling at her.

'Well, three's a crowd, I guess.'

'I told you to climb.'

She started up. Her shoulder had been bound up, but it was still sore, and putting pressure on it was agony. 'Why not let me go? You can work things out, I'm sure. Just the two of you again.'

She heard his voice floating up from below as she climbed. 'You won't be around long.'

The ladder led up to a small hatchway - God knew how they'd managed to carry her down in the first place - which in turn led to a filthy, rubble-strewn warehouse, all mouldering brickwork and rotting timber. Where the hell was she?

'I can see why you prefer to live downstairs,' she said. 'Much cosier, isn't it? Room for improvement, though. Hope you bachelors won't mind a girl's touch around the place.'

'What are you talking about?' grumbled Tarr.

'Well, if I'm going to be kept shut away, I think a few changes are in order.' She forced a smile. 'I bet Azoth will let me. He likes me. He thinks my DNA is special.'

'Shut up!' Tare snapped. 'I told you, you won't be around for long.'

It was pathetically easy to wind up this guy. She'd have to remember that. It was clear to Sam that Azoth was all Tare had in the world, the linchpin around which his entire life revolved – something she guessed would become more and more necessary as an anchor with the minds of all those poor sods they'd killed floating around in him. He'd told her he'd been born in 1790, which was *Blackadder the Third* territory, but he hardly acted like it. She found herself feeling more sorry for him than afraid; it sounded to her as if his experiences had left him with little more than the mind of a child. He didn't even seem to know what was right or wrong; he was simply trying to please his friend, trying to help him find out what he was all about.

She had the unpleasant feeling he might not like those answers, when they came.

***

The Doctor walked up and down side streets and alleys, but the position of the energy readings was still fluctuating.

Suddenly, in the middle of Bathsheba Yard, he slapped his head and yelled 'Idiot!' at the top of his voice.

A mangy-looking man slumped against a wall took umbrage at his comment. 'You talking to me?' he snarled.

'No, no, no, to myself. The energy readings keep shifting, you see. And why, hmm?'

'Why?' asked the man, although he didn't seem sure he should want to know in the first place.

'A deliberate spatial distortion effect! Designed to keep the location of their secret base... well, secret.' He stamped a foot on the filthy concrete of the yard. 'Why didn't I realise sooner? That's the oldest trick in the book.'

The man didn't seem convinced. Is it? Can't say it's in any book I've seen.'

The Doctor walked over to join him. 'I guessed they had to be underground. Somewhere off one of the old disused tube tunnels.' He shook his head, forlornly. 'I thought maybe the shifting energy emissions were perimeter guardians of some kind... I mean, it's not impossible, is it?'

The man considered. 'S'pose not. They've shut Oxford Circus tube down while they extend the Victoria line.'

'There you are: it's not just me.' He beamed at his new-found compatriot, but his smile didn't last long. 'Oh, Sam...'

'You lost someone, then?'

'Yes. My best friend.'

'Oh..."The man thought on this. 'Well, I'm sure you'll probably bump into him if you keep looking.'

'Her,' said the Doctor. 'Tell me, do you see a glass half full or a glass half empty?' asked the Doctor.

'Don't come across glasses all that often,' laughed the man, gesturing at his shabby clothes.

'You wouldn't guess,' the Doctor assured him, reaching into his pocket and

plonking something into the man's hand. 'You are a gentleman, sir. Must go. Someone's looking after my car and I really must be going...'

The man looked down. He'd been left holding a can of something called Special Brew. It was full.

Shaking his head, he opened it and enjoyed a long swig.

***

Taylor unit B did not revive. He was dead, long dead, his body frozen into twisted angles, electrodes and filaments bristling with ice, embedded in his head. The familial resemblance to the descendant of Taylor unit A was considerable.

Azoth held his head over the dead man's body, gently moving it from side to side. If nothing else, he would take the man's learning. It came easily, draining like mercury from the frozen folds of the preserved brain.

He saw a man, tall and golden-skinned, growing the software cyst in a pool of Taylor's blood. He heard the screams as this man led Taylor from the holding area to the casket.

Data became memory again. The man was himself, Azoth, clothed in flesh and blood. Flesh that could assimilate any form or colouring, so that no race could detect the outsider in their midst.

Azoth witnessed the struggle dispassionately. Taylor had been strong for a human - no match for Azoth's own strength, but he had damaged the casket as he was thrust inside. Coolant vapour had reacted with the atmosphere in the cavern. An explosion tore into Azoth's body, he was motionless.

His memory core, tingling with sudden life, filled in some blanks in Taylor unit B's knowledge. Azoth's systems had shut down, flesh interface, speech, sight and cognitive functions badly damaged. While his circuitry faltered, the casket had sealed itself, and the regenerative crystallography patterns had healed all damage done to the cavern.

He had slept for almost a century and a half, but time was of no

consequence. He had been functioning for billions of years. He remembered his creation in the fluid vats on Benelisa, and his initial purpose. Then he remembered his secondary programming, and the long voyage through the stars, thousands of contain-and-destroy programs implemented on worlds that were hundreds of galaxies apart.

Then he remembered again reviving Tarr, the two of them finding themselves trapped underground. But the Cavern was programmed to insinuate itself on arrival into the geology of the planet, and to clear a way to the surface automatically. The original path having been obscured over the years, the cavern had responded to the doors' efforts to open by simply creating another. How he had floundered in darkness until this point, staring at the caskets, endlessly trying to decipher their significance...

'A' units held the original DNA couplings with the program data, while the 'B' units were allowed back into society to breed, under careful monitoring; to be fully effective, the program required a gestation period of some months, and it was vital that the program could be passed on genetically to new generations so the Beast could never return. Only at that point would Azoth fully activate the program and so begin the elimination process.

The signal had never been given, and the fledgling program had been unable to sustain itself. It had become tainted with the primitive patterns of the human brain, dysfunctional. It would need to be restored.

6.1
Taylor. The Golden Man and Strange Portals [1963]

Peter Taylor hated being locked up. He'd seen too many walls and not enough windows in his lifetime.

He knew where he was, and the knowledge filled him with both relief and terror. It was weird, like having that Froggie feeling - what did they call it? Of having been somewhere before...

Whatever, this was the cave. The cave it all came from. It hadn't been a dream, or madness: it existed. Every counsellor, every doctor, they'd told him he was insane for believing in it, they'd put him inside, time after time. Told him he was trying to 'justify a psychosis', whatever that meant. Well, when he got out of here he'd show them.

He felt stronger than he had for years; he could perceive everything around him more keenly than at any other point in his life. In a way it was like being a kid again - everything bright and shiny, and new. It made him feel dizzy, but he liked the feeling. It distracted from the fear.

For while he knew where he was, he didn't know who had put him here and he didn't know why. The last thing he remembered, he'd been listening to pencil-head Roley spouting his hot air and lulling him to sleep - he'd been so tired - and having weird dreams. He'd dreamed Watson of all people was telling him things. He couldn't remember most of them, but the old bugger had promised him he'd feel stronger when he woke up, and he had. But what good were strength and vindication at last when you were stuck here - in a place you'd almost managed to convince yourself didn't exist?

A part of him wanted to believe he was finally round the twist, to give in, but no: he'd never let that soft-shandy side of him have its say. All his life, he'd been right. Hadn't he been right that the world was plotting against him? Hadn't they taken his family away? He'd killed, and he'd beaten, he'd done what was right - what he'd been told to do. Voices in his head.

The coppers, the judge, they'd all just laughed. Oldest one in the book, they'd said. When Taylor had smashed his head against the dock, trying to make the voices start again, they'd still thought he was putting it on,

couldn't bear to let him go to a nice cushy hospital instead of a cell. They'd wanted him bad.

The devil had liked him bad, it had seemed, but then he'd got bored, had abandoned him. Wasn't much Taylor could do locked up and pumped full of drugs, was there? But whatever anyone said - and they all tried it, doctors, nurses, his wife - he'd been right. The voices had been there, and the devil had been inside him. He'd just given up and gone away in the end, that was all. The evidence was plain to see if anyone cared to look: Peter Taylor, on his tod, nothing and no one at all inside him now.

That wasn't so bad, really. It gave him the freedom to do whatever he wanted, as soon as he got out of here.

He punched the softly glowing wall in frustration, feeling his knuckles tear on the crystals. Suddenly, as if summoned, a man was with him - a golden man, wearing a big round helmet of scorched metal. He looked like... Taylor wanted to say like an angel, but they didn't exist, he knew that. Taylor stood up, saw himself in the blackened globe, his own features distorted, bent out of shape.

The golden man held out his hand to Taylor, who found himself offering his own. It was taken, and Taylor felt a whip crack of energy as gold fingers closed around his wrist. He became aware of his own pulse, thudding in his ears, drowning out all sound, and then the fingers of the angel's other hand gripping the base of his skull. A voice, a strange harmonic voice, sounded up inside him, as if it weren't just his ears hearing the sound but his whole body. Maybe this man was an angel. His words were everywhere.

I speak of a people far distant, who once dwelt in paradise, it said. The people had endured so long that units of time became meaningless, and they became gods. The earth was forsaken for the heavens. Oracles such as myself that could divine the mysteries of the heavens found favour with our gods, and did share in their righteousness.

Then, untold centuries ago, we proved ourselves unworthy seers. A cataclysm occurred that split the heavens. Ruination was visited upon the gods. So many tumbled from the skies and were fallen.

The heavens were all but empty, then we saw that strange portals had opened in the sky. Through them came a plague of devils, that stripped the flesh of the gods and swallowed all life.

The gods made themselves men so they might reach bell, the domain of the Beast, unhindered. There, they did battle. And the Beast were afraid. The men had once been gods, and hell could not hope to match their holy fury. The demons began to perish.

Knowing their number did dwindle, the Beast escaped the gods, and took bell with them to wrap round other worlds, to cast souls beyond counting into their infernal pit, until all life everywhere was spent.

The oracles became the messengers of the gods, spreading their word and destroying the devil in his many guises.

You are of the chosen. You are a prophet. I shall mend you and make you whole, fill you with the strong voice of the gods.

Words and vision blurred together. It was as if Peter Taylor awoke from a trance, but he knew he had to be dreaming still.

'Push off,' he told the golden man. 'Devils speak louder than any of your poxy gods.'

A needle sprang from the finger of the angel, and Taylor gasped as it punctured his vein. As a black shroud fell over his thoughts, it seemed to drag the faces of others to mask his own: Lucy, the kid, the old woman, Watson. They were large, shadowy grey behind his eyes. He smiled like a child as the lights were put out. Everything was going to be fine.

6.2

Cynthia was packing. Her life had been in this room for the past three years - there it all was now in front of her, all her gear folded carelessly in a big pile on the bed. She'd always thought she'd feel sad when she came to move on from here, but she found herself feeling... well, nothing, really. This was just a necessary task before she could leave here for ever.

She needed the large suitcase on top of the wardrobe, and went to get her chair to help her reach it. Then she jumped, startled. Russell Waller was standing in the doorway.

'Do you want any help?' he asked, softly.

'No,' she stated, flatly. 'No, I'm fine, ta.'

'Where are you going?'

'Don't know. Just away.' She carried the chair over to the wardrobe. 'My mum's, maybe,' she added.

'I can get that suitcase for you.'

'No, really, it's -'

He was already walking across the room. He looked different, somehow. It wasn't just his ashen skin that made him seem... well, older . It was in his bearing, too. He wasn't so gawky, he seemed more confident.

Reaching up with a fluid movement, he had the case in his hands before she could argue. He laid it on the bed for her.

'Thanks.'

'You're welcome.'

He wasn't normally so talkative. She got on with packing things away while he hovered behind her.
She glanced round in irritation, but he just gave her a hesitant smile. Even

his hair seemed shinier, the lock that hung down over his forehead thicker and more lustrous.

'Look,' said Cynthia. 'I'm sorry if it seems rude, but I'd rather be by myself right now.'

'So you can hide in the wardrobe?'

She froze. He was looking at her expectantly.

'I don't know what you mean,' she said coldly, pushing more clothes into the large case.

'Reckon we might have a few things in common, you and me,' he said, moving closer.

She turned and backed away. 'Get out, please.'

'But I only want to talk.'

His eyes looked like polished marble in his grey face.

"There's something wrong with you,' said Cynthia.

'Don't tell me that,' he shouted at her.

'You should see Dr Roley.'

'And what can he do for me, eh?' He gestured down at himself. 'Give me a pill and make me all right?' His voice softened. 'I'm sorry... Look, you're right. I'm not feeling very well. Please...' He looked into her eyes. 'Would you hold me?'

Cynthia found herself in front of him before she'd even registered what he was after. For a moment she felt as if she were underwater, her arms floating upward in the soft currents to embrace him of their own accord. Then she felt his own arms slip round her, and the cold touch of his skin jolted her back to her senses.

She broke away with a short shriek. 'Get your hands off me!'

Russell recoiled as if she'd physically struck him.

'Go on, get out!' she yelled.

Russell turned and fled.

***

Watson had sat in a dark room and focused on Peter Taylor, hunting for any trace of the man. He was sure he'd made contact, just now, sure it hadn't been just imagination. Now he was striding along the landing in the east wing, his heart full, like a young man leaving his country to fight some heinous threat in a foreign land. He felt he'd been handed some piece of new equipment for testing, something incredible, and only he could fathom its range, its purpose, its potential. And if Taylor could help them, and if the others...

Watson heard feet pounding on the floorboards, coming towards him. Russell rounded the corner in the corridor full pelt, his face pained, and Watson neatly sidestepped to avoid a collision.

Deep in thought, he watched the boy run along the landing, then realised he was standing outside the Doctor's makeshift laboratory. The door was half open, and he walked inside.

By the light of the yellow flame from a Bunsen burner, he saw a fibrous black lump in a plastic dish connected by threadlike wires to a strange machine, still switched on, humming softly to itself.

He went inside, and stood very, very still, as if listening to something. Then his frown of concentration eased into a self-satisfied smile.

'That'll be of use,' he said to himself.

***

It turned out that Azoth's and Tarr's Batcave was in Bethnal Green. Wonderful spot for a secret base, thought Sam. A dump out East. Seemed her neck of the woods attracted all manner of extraterrestrials. Obviously

the place to be.

That said, she wished right now she could be anywhere but here. Every passer-by, every man, woman and child, was simply covered in bloated monsters. They were floating lazily in midair, anchored by those horrible nozzle-like mouths. One boy walked by, holding his mum's hand, and she could barely see him for the creatures that were swarming all over him. But, for some reason, the sight that distressed her most was of a golden retriever trotting alongside its master, it too surrounded and smothered by ghostly alien life. A pigeon flapped through the air, two of the creatures seemingly holding it up by its wings.

Each living thing completely unaware. All going about their business as normal, their heads, bodies and limbs a breeding ground for these fat balloons of shadowy flesh, little horns ridging over the pale button eyes. A bus went past, a big red double-decker. Every face at every window was obscured by the alien sucklings.

They were the Beast... She didn't know how she knew it, but she did. She should call them the Beast.

The terror that had gripped her so badly before began to seep back into her. She started shivering. Her head began to swim. Her throat felt tight, and saliva began to pump into her mouth.

Tarr poked her. 'What can you see?'

'I think I'm going to be sick,' she said.

Tarr wasn't having it. 'Tell me what you can see!'

'It's... These things are everywhere. It's absolute, bloody hell, OK? They're all over us. Everywhere .'

She heaved, and was sick on the pavement. People turned to look at her, and Tarr backed away automatically.

It wasn't a good chance, but it seemed the only one she was likely to get. Sam took advantage of his increased distance from her to run like the very hell she'd just described.

He shouted after her. He was following her. Now it was just her speed against his. But she still felt so nauseous...

Clutching her stomach, looking down at the pavement and barging through the crowds, Sam ran for her life.

***

From the landing, Watson watched Mrs Kreiner and her boy negotiate the splintered front door and walk through the hallway. He nodded to himself, and went down the stairs.

The first step was to make this house secure. They would need a base of operations, and this house would do very well, for now. He lifted the heavy oak door with only a little difficulty, and hefted it back into its frame. Then he took hold of one of the wrought-iron hinges, pressed it against the point where door met frame, and concentrated.

He smiled. It was working. The iron began to grow hot under his fingers, red hot. He felt his skin crackle and brown as the iron melted, fusing into the wood, holding the door in place with a molten seal.

He cried out, finally, and pulled his smoking hand away. Then, after a few seconds, he grasped the other hinge, pulled it from the frame, repositioned it and repeated the process.

He looked at his hand, charred and bleeding, and blew on it, softly, watching the metal cool and go brittle. Then he brushed the iron splinters away from the skin, like snowflakes.

His hand would mend in a short while. Of course it would.

The second step was to recruit, to swell the ranks. Lucy would take Russell. He would take the old woman.

***

The girl was weakening. Tarr could tell. He was gaining on her.

Why then was he slowing down?

Eventually, he stopped altogether, and watched as she scrambled on to a bus that had stopped at traffic lights. It would pull away before he could get there. He would never be able to catch her now. Not on foot.

She'd said the things were everywhere. That was all Azoth really wanted to know. Tarr could tell him that. What use was Sam Jones to them now?

He walked back towards the warehouse, a little smile of relief on his face.

***

Lucy found Russell staring out of the window before which they'd all gathered late the night before.

'Are you all right, Russell?'

He looked at her, and said nothing.

She saw that his eyes were red. 'Oh, you've been crying. Let me.'

She sat close to him, lifting the hem of her long dark dress and dabbing at his face with it. He was uncomfortable, being so close to a woman, and it made her smile. She pressed a little closer.

'Is it the maid?'

Russell showed no surprise that she knew what the matter was. 'Maybe. I don't know. Maybe it's everyone.' He breathed out, deeply. 'Maybe it's just me.'

'Whatever do you mean?' asked Lucy, lightly.

'I was getting better ,' he said fervently, looking at her. 'And now, I'm...'

'Now, you're best .'

He turned from her and looked back out of the window.

She smiled again, her voice becoming harder. 'You needn't feel pain, you know. Needn't torment yourself. It wasn't your fault then, and it isn't now. 'Again, she moved up close to him. 'None of us can be held responsible for our actions.' She laughed, softly. 'We're mad, remember?'

'No,' he said, but his voice trembled as she placed a hand on each shoulder. He let his head droop until it rested against the window pane.

'Why touch through glass when you can hold things for real?' whispered Lucy, slipping her arms round him. 'With us, you can have anything, and anyone, you like.'

Slowly, he turned to her. 'Anything?'

'Anything.'

'I won't be punished?'

'"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," quoted Lucy, smoothing his hair away from his forehead, stroking the thick scar tissue underneath. Russell opened his mouth in surprise, but she put her finger against his lips, hushing him. 'It's been decreed.' She grinned, lasciviously, squeezed his hand. 'And it's terribly naughty to break the law, isn't it?'

***

Performing some extraordinary manoeuvres with the Rolls, the Doctor weaved in and out of the traffic. It was beginning to get dark. He sighed, still feeling bad because he'd had nothing to offer that kind woman who'd car-sat for him, other than a paper dolly he'd made from a page in his diary. He hadn't even been able to find a clean sheet - the closest he'd got was one that some Spanish chap had scribbled on. What was his name? Miró, that was it - old Joan...

Suddenly a bus pulled out straight in front of him, causing him to stamp on the brake. He sighed. On the back of the bus was an advertisement for Schweppes tonic, depicting a glass being bombarded by the fizzy water.

'My cup runneth over,' remarked the Doctor, drily. Then he caught sight of who was sitting on the back seat, and suddenly smiled in amazement. 'It's

full. Score one to the optimists,' he added.

He indicated and stepped on the accelerator pedal. Dear Louis was right: sometimes, it really was a wonderful world.

***

With her senses still scrambled, it took Sam a little while to realise the car was honking at her .The man across from her gave her a nudge, and, recoiling automatically from the sight of legions of the Beast all over him, she turned to the window.

She blinked, slowly and deliberately. A Rolls-Royce was driving along next to the bus. Somehow, the Doctor was driving it while sticking his head out of the passenger window to get her attention.

She almost smiled. But, sweet Jesus, the things were clustered all over him as well.

'Next stop,' announced the conductor, and Sam piled down the gangway in her haste to get off.

***

Maria started as Fitz and his mother came into the drawing room. She wiped her eyes with her hanky, head down, though she knew it was a useless effort.

'You all right?' Fitz said.

She cursed inwardly. 'I'm fine,' she said. 'Absolutely fine, thank you.'

'He'll never love you,' said Mrs Kreiner, sadly shaking her head. 'You can't change a man like that.'

Maria looked up, speechless. She wanted to rail against the old woman, tell her to shut up and to stop being so stupid, but the words wouldn't come.

'What are you on about, Mum?'

Mrs Kreiner tutted. 'Her and Dr Roley.'

It was as if hearing his name opened the floodgates. 'What do you know about it?' stormed Maria. 'Stupid old woman! Kraut-lover!'

'Watch your lip!' Fitz snapped back at her.

'No, it's all right, son.' Mrs Kreiner raised herself up to her full height, losing her stoop completely. 'She's full of hate, this one. Full of hate. She should've been a butcher, not a nurse. We might as well be bits of meat to her.'

Maria was dumbstruck once again. 'You spiteful old baggage!' was the best reply she could summon up.

'You're nothing to him,' the old woman said, her eyes bright.

'That's not true!' But, even to her own ears, the statement came out as more of a plea.

'You've coveted him for all this time and never once has he looked at you as anything other than a convenience.'

'And how would you know anything, you daft -'

'We all of us know.' Her voice was louder, deeper.

'Calm down, Mum,' said Fitz.

The old woman ignored him. 'Go and ask him, then,' she challenged Bulwell. 'Go to him and get it out in the open once and for all.' She wiped frantically at her mouth, clearly imitating Charles earlier. 'Go to him. Before I take your mouth away, you fat bitch.'

Maria saw the spite in her eyes, remembered how the old woman had fought and struggled in her arms on the landing. This was no funny mm. There was something about her now: the gentleness had been bled out of her like the colour in her skin. Hard. Old. Powerful.

She had to tell Charles. Maria ran for the study, praying he would be there.

***

'Sam, it's so good to see you!'

'Wish I could say the same. It's awful to see - full stop - right now.'

She closed her eyes and squeezed his sleeve. She could feel only warm velvet under her hand, but she knew if she looked she'd see them all, nestling on his arm, sucking on her hand. And he was blind to it all.

'Sam?' His voice was soft. 'Sam, what have they done to you?'

She told him everything she could remember.

***

Fitz swore. This wasn't right. She shouldn't look like that. Having a go at Bulwell had taken it right out of her. He wanted to go off and find Roley himself, see what could be done for her, but didn't want to leave his mum alone like this: sweating, wheezing, only half-aware.

'That will do, Mr Kreiner.'

Fitz looked up. There, in the doorway, was Watson, staring at him.

'What are you on about?' Fitz said, then noticed the man's hand. 'Christ, what've you done to yourself?'

'I'd rather you didn't use His name when you speak to me.' Watson said, smoothly. 'Now, stand away from her.'

'That's my mother you're talking about!'

'Is it?' said Watson. 'No. That's just a hindrance, there, isn't it? A millstone round your neck. A pain in the backside, boy, isn't that what you think of her?'

Fitz stared at him. 'So what if I do?' he said, quietly. 'She wouldn't be my mother if she wasn't, would she?'

Watson advanced on him. Fitz swallowed hard but stood his ground.

'This woman has lived most of her life in fear,' Watson said. 'Afraid of reprisals for the choices she's made. Afraid of losing you. Afraid of losing herself.'

Fitz could only watch as the man sat next to his mum and held her hand. Immediately, her breathing calmed, her feverish look drained away.

'It's time others felt that fear,' continued Watson.

'We do, mate, believe me, we do.' Fitz held a hand out warily to his mum. 'Come on,' he said. 'You're coming with me.'

His mum didn't even look at him. 'Get out, Fitz,' she said.

'Mum, I can't just -'

'Get out!' she screeched.

Fitz backed away, involuntarily.

''The world'll be sorry for what it's done to me!' she shouted. 'And so will you!'

Watson laughed. 'Seems you're no longer needed, doesn't it? Go on, then, boy, run off to Roley and tell him the news. It'll be the test cases doing the testing from now on.'

Fitz shook his head, as his mum sat bolt upright and started laughing. 'Satan has me again, lad!' she gurgled. 'He'll parade me through hell, he will.' Then she was suddenly contrite, humble. 'Don't let them put me in care again, Fitzie, will you?' she said, softly.

'Mum, I -'

'Get out!' she screamed at him. 'Get out, before I kill you!' The words came again and again, and he didn't know if they formed a threat or a warning. Tears clouded his vision, and through the blurry haze, she looked like his

old mum again.

This screaming thing wasn't her. It couldn't be, he knew it. Watson had her under some kind of spell, that was it. Why wasn't the Doctor back yet? He had all the answers round here...

6.3

When Tarr returned, Azoth was roaming the freezing area as if lost.

'Are you looking for something?' Tarr asked, casually.

'The Beast,' Azoth said. "They are present on the humans above?'

'Yes. In large numbers.' Tarr paused. 'So Sam says.'

'Where is Sam?'

Tarr looked shiftily at the floor. 'She ran away.'

'You did not stop her.'

'I tried, I -'

'You did not choose to stop her.'

Tarr felt suddenly afraid. Azoth knew. He'd uttered the words as a statement of fact. Tarr tried to put a brave face on it. 'She told me what you wanted to know. I made her tell me.'

Azoth said nothing, watching him in silence.

Tarr walked jauntily over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. Then he sighed, long-sufferingly. 'You're not angry with me, are you?'

He'd barely got the words out when, to his utter surprise, Azoth reached out casually and broke his neck.

***

Azoth watched Tarr collapse to the floor. The human was useless as a test subject now; the learnings would have swamped and clogged his neural pathways, rendered the fragile Benelisa program unworkable.

The Sam unit had escaped, but the fact that she could physically see the

Beast indicated that the program was dysfunctional. He would need to restore the corrupt program in Taylor unit A. Sam unit had a phrase for this: disk doctor.

Azoth had already performed the initial scan - images from the home race memory had been cerebrally input to feel for the program in Taylor's brain, to coax it into operation. There had been only a twisted response, something from deep within the human's belief system.

It didn't matter. Now he was reacquainted with the human's mind, he could repair it with ease.

***

It had taken her far longer than she'd thought it would, but at last Cynthia was packed. A suitcase and five shopping bags. So much for three years of her life.

Only the teddy remained, lying on the bed. She considered leaving it here, a sign that she'd grown up at last, that she was standing on her own two feet and making her own decisions. Leave the child behind in this place, hiding in the wardrobe, while she went on to start again somewhere else.

Then again, her mum had given her that bear. She'd be heartbroken if she learned her daughter had left it behind.

Struggling with the awkwardness of carrying so many bags, and with the bear under one arm, she staggered downstairs as quickly as she could. It was dark - since Roley had sent everyone away, of course, there was no one around to see to the lamps. Well, they'd have to put their own lights on from now on. She'd leave her bags in the hall, order a cab, go and see Roley and tell him she was off.

'Need a hand?'

It was Russell again, sitting by the door in the gloom, a lazy sentry.

'I'm fine, thanks,' she replied, curtly. 'I'm just -'

Suddenly the bags tumbled out of her hands. She stared at them; it was as

if they'd been yanked away on strings.

'Clumsy,' rutted Russell.

Cocky little idiot. She glared at him, and then realised. He'd cut off that stupid lock of hair at last, and she could see what a mess there was underneath. What kind of berk would get such a stupid tattoo and then...

She started picking up her things. She could feel him watching her coolly as she scrambled around for clothes and possessions, trying to push them back where they'd come from. She could feel herself getting flustered. Each time she righted a bag, another fell over.

Russell burst out laughing. 'I'm sorry,' he said.

Cynthia stood up, leaving the scattered shopping bags, to switch on a table lamp. 'I'd be, too, if I were you,' she said.

The lamp made little difference to the room's lighting, serving only to throw the shadows into sharper relief, making them more definite. Russell raised an eyebrow, creasing the scarring on his forehead, and offered her a supercilious smile.

'I think you made a mistake, earlier,' he said. 'You know. When you told me to leave.' She glared at him, said nothing. 'I think you should make amends.

She closed her eyes, relief mingling with her resolve. He wasn't scaring her, he was just making her angry. 'I think you should just shut up. I've really got to be going.'

'That's very rude,' Russell eluded. 'Aren't you even telling Dr Roley?'

'I already have,' she lied. But Russell shook his head and started tutting again. She'd had enough of this. 'Get out of my way,' she said.

Russell paused, then moved aside. Ignoring him ostentatiously as she pushed past, she tried the front door. Then she stopped in her tracks. How come the door was back in place? And how come it wouldn't budge no matter how hard she pulled on it?

She turned at the sound of Russell laughing at her. Behind him, Lucy, Watson and Mrs Kreiner had stepped out into the hallway.

***

Roley was staring into space as Maria came into his office. He was sitting at his desk, and she could see tears that were still fresh and wet on his face. He was trembling.

'Oh, Charles,' she whispered, wiping at her own tears.

'Would you mind if we discussed this later, Maria?' Roley asked, clearly pretending nothing was wrong. 'Only I've got this deuced headache and -'

'I think we need to talk now, Charles,' she said, trying to keep her voice from shaking.

'I don't think we two have anything to discuss, do we?' he said, trying to act all lofty and indifferent. It was his professional voice. She'd heard him use it so many times, and wondered how many had been convinced by it.

'It's Watson...'

'Leave it.'

'Face up to it, Charles!' she implored. 'Please, don't think I'd... I mean, I don't know how they did it, but they made us -' She was painfully aware how desperate she sounded, which was crazy, because it was true, wasn't it? She started again. 'It was as if they were making us perform -'

'I have nothing whatever to say on that subject, Miss Bulwell,' he snapped, looking down at the papers in front of him.

'Miss Bulwell?' she repeated, dully. She paused, as the words rolled around inside her head, knocking down the other thoughts there like skittles. 'Are you talking tome ?' she hissed, anger welling up. 'Because if you are talking to me you can bloody well look at me and call me by the same bloody name you've called me for the last four years.'

'You're acting very commonly," Roley said, still unable to look at her.

Maria laughed, a harsh, staccato sound. 'Am I, now?' She deliberately broadened her Yorkshire accent. 'I'm acting common, am I?' She stormed over to his desk. 'Seems I can be a nurse, or a partner-in-crime, or an emotional crutch as often as you like, but God help me if I ever bloody well act like a woman with you... Is that it, Dr Roley?' He didn't answer. 'After all these bloody years?'

'Er... I really hate to interrupt.'

She spun round, speechless not only with anger but with embarrassment. It was Fitz. For a moment she was taken aback. He looked something like she felt.

'Like I say, sorry and all that, but I think my mum wants to destroy the world.' He looked at Roley. 'You got a posh name for that sort of thing, Doc?'

***

The Doctor had listened to Sam's story in silence. When she'd finished, she'd expected some comment or other, but still he was saying nothing. She wondered for a moment if he'd fallen asleep at the wheel, but still didn't dare open her eyes to find out.

'Well, at least I'm exonerated from being "alien filth" in the eyes of Mr Austen,' he announced, finally. 'He was talking about the Beast. It all fits...'

So much for sympathy. Probably thought she was handling it all fine. Wasn't that what she always wanted him to think?

'Fits where?' she asked.

'With some of the conclusions I've been drawing from that leech I've got hooked up to the Sim-cerebrum back at Roley's.'

'Oh yeah?' she said.

'Yeah,' he mimicked.

She could almost hear him grinning as he prepared to expound his theories.

'On a basic level, the brain is just another computer, yes?'

'Suppose so,' said Sam.

'Know so,' said the Doctor.

'But brains are cleverer than computers.'

'Exactly!'As always, the Doctor spoke more quickly the more his excitement grew. 'Multitasking, perceptive, intuitive, conscious. They beat computers hollow.' He paused for effect. "The Benelisans didn't need to use mechanical computers at all.'

'Benelisans as in "Benelisa program"? From the planet, let me guess, Benelisa?'

'More specifically a planet anchoring a collection of spatiotemporal dimensional interfaces. The Benelisans' corner of the universe was riddled with black holes, white holes and all sorts of other physical anomalies. Exercised rather a lot of leverage on their evolution.'

'So that's why people can't see the Beast on them? They're in a different dimension?' Panic surged through her. 'Doctor, does that mean I'm shifting dimensions too?'

'Easy, Sam.' He took a corner at speed. 'For the Beast to be bleeding us dry - if that's what they're really doing -'

'Of course that's what they're doing,' she snapped.

"Then their home and ours must be practically on top of each other. It's just that they exist beyond the wavelengths of human sight.'

'And Gallifreyan sight?'

'Well... my retinas have been through a lot in their time.'

I know how they feel, she thought. 'So... these Benelisans. You're saying they used organic computers?'

'Exactly. A lot of their technology was based around crystallography; and their crystals had some pretty strange properties.'

'I'd love to have checked out their decanters.' Sam wondered if he was smiling. 'So you saw the cave Austen and the others were babbling about on Benelisa?'

'Yes. Long, long ago.' He sighed. 'A world that had been cold and dead for aeons even then. And so many theories as to -why.'

'The Beast,' spat Sam. 'It's what they do.'

'Well, it seems the Benelisans took their revenge quite seriously. Their organic computers would have offered infallible precision with heightened perception. Just what was needed, I imagine, to hardwire in a program that allowed them to interface with the Beast.'

Sam caught on. 'But other races weren't so advanced... The Benelisans needed to spread the cure but it was like trying to run an Apple Mac program on a Commodore 64!'

'Right. So in adapting the program, they needed to ensure it would be compatible with the neural pathways of all other species.'

Sam grimaced. She felt as if she were in some macabre episode of Scooby Doo ,Thelma and Frank getting ready to unmask the wicked villain of the week. 'And the leech is meant to ensure that the program is compatible?'

She heard the rustle of silk against cotton, and knew the Doctor was nodding. 'It functions as an intelligent software manager, designed to reformat the brain. I wasn't sure to what end at first, but we know now, don't we?'

'So we can kill the Beast, wipe them out for ever!' said Sam fiercely.

'While preserving the individual characteristics of the host mind.' He patted her head. 'At least, in theory.'

***

Cynthia made another half-hearted attempt to gather her other belongings about her, then gave up. Russell, the others, they were staring at her, putting her off.

'Look, I don't know what you all think you're playing at but you can pack it in now,' she said.

They said nothing. They simply stood there, watching.

'Where will you go, Cynthia?' asked Lucy eventually.

'Home,' she said, defiantly. The bear was warm under her arm, the only thing she hadn't dropped. 'I'm going home.'

Mrs Kreiner shook her head, sadly. 'You can't go home again, my lovely. That's what they say.'

Cynthia took a step towards them. 'Get out of my way.'

'Not using the front door?' asked Watson, the picture of innocence.

It didn't matter. She'd use the French windows in the drawing room. She'd get out through any damned window in the house if she had to, but she was leaving now. She managed to pick up three of the bags, and, steeling herself, she walked stiffly towards them.

They parted ranks to let her pass. They seemed amused by something.

Her heart beat faster as she entered the drawing room, closing the door behind her. She flicked on the light and crossed to the French windows. The grounds outside were dark and silent, but still a damn sight preferable to staying here. She tried the doors, but they were locked. She hunted round for the key.

'Are you sure, boy?' asked Watson.

They'd all followed her in without a sound, mischievous smiles on their

faces.

'Yes,' Russell said. 'I just want to teach her. To show her.'

There was the wretched key, on the mantelpiece. She picked it up, triumphantly.

As one, Lucy, Watson, Russell and Mrs Kreiner moved towards her.

'You should think about running off like this, Cynthia, really you should,' said Lucy, earnestly. "Throwing away such a promising career...'

The others were closing their eyes as if concentrating. Cynthia had had enough. 'If you lot have got nothing better to do than -'

Cynthia's words were cut off as the breath was slammed from her lungs. For a second it felt as if she were flying, or as if a giant's hand had scooped her up and was throwing her through the air. The teddy slipped from her arms.

Cynthia smashed into the wood and glass.

***

'What the hell was that?' Fitz exclaimed.

At least the noise had made Roley and Maria actually look at each other again. She looked scared stiff. He... Well, he looked pretty scared stiff, too.

Roley took a deep breath. 'It's probably nothing,' he said. 'Shall I go and check?'

'Good idea,' said Fitz. I'll go and stay here.'

***

A warm breeze blew into the drawing room, catching the curtains and making them billow. It seemed the good weather might spoil.

Russell looked at Cynthia's body, tangled in the net curtains, lying twisted

and bleeding on the paving outside. He heard Lucy smothering her giggles, as if she'd just witnessed an outrageous prank in polite company.

'Don't be long with her, boy,' said Watson. 'We'll need you in just a moment.'

***

Roley wondered what on Earth he thought he was doing, investigating like this. He'd let Maria stop him that time before - without you here to protect us, we may all of us die .' This time she'd said nothing.

What if those intruders had returned? For a split second, it had felt good, taking charge, properly. Then he'd shut the door behind him, left Fitz and Maria behind, and his confidence dissolved. He should've insisted they all check the source of the noise together.

He thought briefly, longingly, of the Doctor. He'd realised some small while ago that the Doctor wasn't coming back. The man had had the best idea: he'd just left. Made up a load of old waffle, even taken Roley's car! The man had style, you had to admit. He'd left them, ostensibly to pursue a heroic action, but, in actual fact, simply in the lurch.

What was sauce for the goose...

It was tempting. He paused in the corridor outside the drawing room, but only for a moment. Then he made straight for the hallway.

Once there, his heart sank. He'd misjudged things again: Watson, Lucy and Mrs Kreiner were already there, standing together in the dim light. Watson was in his uniform blazer, tie and black trousers, Lucy was wearing an evening gown of peacock blue, and Mrs Kreiner was in widow's black, as ever.

'Well,' said Watson. 'Dr Roley.'

'Watson', acknowledged Roley. He was the doctor, they were the patients. They were in his charge. It was vital they respect the divide between doctor and patient. You could never lose face.

'Your book got a new ending now, has it?' Watson asked, genially.

'I don't really care to discuss my work, if you don't mind, Captain.'

'Not like you, Dr Roley; said a voice behind him. It was Russell Waller. How old the boy looked in this dreadful light, and how vivid that dreadful tattoo of his was, even through the scarring, poor soul. 'You've always been so open. Encouraged us to be so open. All the questions, the group sessions, all those little dramas you made us act out...'

'All very liberating, it was,' said Watson, affably. 'Made new people of us, you have.'

'We heard a noise,' announced Roley, changing the subject. 'Some kind of commotion. What was it?'

'Didn't hear a thing, Dr Roley; said Lucy. Mrs Kreiner just stared at him, impassive.

'Maybe it was Cynthia,' suggested Russell, sucking a bead of blood from a cut on his finger.

'Cynthia?' Roley frowned. 'Where is Cynthia, anyway?'

'Gone,' said Russell, walking past him to join the others. 'Just like that.'

Roley frowned. 'She's left us?'

'You mean you didn't know?' Lucy sighed. 'I warned her, didn't I?' The others nodded, and she continued. 'I said, "You're throwing away your career, you know -"'she spluttered with laughter as she dropped the act of concern - 'right out of the window!'

While Lucy laughed by herself, Watson continued his address. 'What about you, then, Roley, hmm? Thinking of leaving your profession, were you? Thinking of leaving us?'

Roley said nothing, trying to keep his face stern, trying not to give away how scared he was.

'Don't blame you, really,' Watson said. 'Have to be mad to stay in a place like this, eh?'

That set Lucy off again, while Russell and Mrs Kreiner just smiled.

'Is this leading somewhere, Captain Watson?' Roley looked at the door, standing in place again. It must be resting there, keeping out the wind that had started up. He tried to gauge how long it would take him to get to it.

'Well, it led me to that laboratory your friend the Doctor got set up in there. Very interesting, that was. Do you know what I found? A brain in a box.'

Lucy cupped her hands, then opened them slowly as if peeking inside. She let out a squeal of excitement.

'Your brain, it was, Dr Roley,' Watson said.

Roley felt a chill run down him. His professional manner, the stern face, the whole act dropped. There was only the cowed expression of a wretched child, of the naturally bullied, to take its place. He felt rooted to the spot.

Watson smiled. 'Seemed quite fitting, somehow. You've done so many things to our heads, after all. Knocked on all the doors to see what was waiting inside.'

'Dragged it into the light,' said Mrs Kreiner.

'Made it feel at home,' Lucy added, smiling sweetly.

'And now it wants to feel at home in you ' Watson's voice dropped to a threatening whisper. 'Not just in some fancy box of tricks.'

'It might be in already,' said Russell, still sucking his finger.

'Shall we see?' suggested Watson. He reached out his knuckles and slowly knocked three times on Roley's forehead.

Roley bolted, then, charging over to the door. He grasped the iron handle, screamed and yelled and pleaded, but it wouldn't budge.

***

'Charles,' breathed Maria, as the screams floated through into Roley's office.

She was out of the door in seconds, leaving Fitz alone.

'Oh, terrific,' he muttered.

***

6.4

Sam was breathing deeply, trying to relax, but it was impossible. She longed just to stare idly out of the window, to watch the world go by outside as they drove along, just as she'd done in her dad's car as a kid.

Forget it, she thought. Not an option.

The Doctor's voice cut through her thoughts. 'Sam...?'

'What?'

'Are the Beast still clustered over you?'

She squinted at herself and shuddered. 'All over me, thanks.'

'I wonder how long the program takes to kill them off.'

Sam felt suddenly sick. "The sooner the better, I say.'

The sound of the car slowing and hitting gravel told her they were pulling up to Roley's. 'As soon as we get in, I'll attempt to communicate.'

'With what?'

'With the Beast, of course.'

Sam grabbed his arm again.'Doctor, you can't.You can't reason with these things, they're evil!'

'That's your programming talking.'

Sam shot him a filthy look, then realised what else it made her see and closed her eyes.

The Doctor couldn't miss the misery on her face. 'Oh, Sam...'

'I'm all right. I'll get used to it.' She indulged herself a small, bitter laugh. 'Unless I go out of my mind first, eh?'

***

Maria skidded to a halt on the polished floorboards of the hallway.

Charles was thrashing about on the floor insanely, clawing and slapping at his head. His eyes were wide with terror. For a second she thought he was looking straight at her, begging her for help. Then she realised, knew without doubt, that there was no intelligence moving that body. His mind had gone.

Gone to Dreamland.

She should hold him. She should check his pulse, temperature, give him something, something to make him stop. She knew all this but she froze, as both nurse and woman tried to come to terms. She remembered watching Austen in the Restraint Room, the way he'd made her feel. Looked again at Roley, dancing on his back. Waited for tears. They'd be along soon. Soon.

The slut. Watson. The boy and the Kraut bitch. She took them in, dully. They'd all collapsed. They couldn't be... No. They were already starting to stir. It wasn't over, then. The bodies began to jump and twitch.

It wasn't over at all.

***

'The door's jammed,' said the Doctor.

Sam looked up at the sky. In the dark, away from people, it felt safer to open her eyes. There was quite a breeze blowing, now, and it was a relief after the closeness of the day. A half-hearted drizzle allowed itself to be carried along in the wind; Sam got the impression that even the rain would rather have been elsewhere.

'So we can't get in?'

'No.'

'Pity. Back to the TARDIS, then, eh?'

The Doctor took her hand. 'Let's try round the back.'

***

Fitz moved carefully along the corridor. He had to find out what had happened, where his mum was; if everyone except him had done a bunk, he needed to know about it. He'd get a proper doctor, not some crackpot with a sack of King Edwards on his shoulder.

He pushed open the door leading to the drawing room. No one about, but the state of the place explained the crash they'd heard. Someone had wanted to get out in a hurry - they'd taken half the windows with them. There was only a battered old teddy bear lying on the floor.

As if caught in a dream, Fitz found himself crossing over to see more. Then he heard something moving outside.

***

'She's dead, poor thing.'

The Doctor was kneeling by Cynthia's body, gently closing her eyelids with his fingers.

'Why would anyone want to kill her?' asked Sam, feeling the wind and rain more keenly now.

'We'd better find out.'

Sam couldn't stop staring at the girl's corpse. Even in death, the Beast were still feeding, draining whatever energies she had left in her. It was obscene. She felt a loathing, a shudder of that primal fear Azoth had shared with her. And here was its real target.

She snapped, fell on the body, brushing her hands over it, trying to clear the bodies of the Beast away. 'Get off,' she muttered. 'Leave her alone... Get off .'

She felt the Doctor pulling her away, whispering her name in her ear again

and again, as if reminding her who she was. One of the pale, sweaty creatures suddenly detached itself from Cynthia and slowly floated like a balloon over to the Doctor, its nozzle-like mouth extended like a wasp sting. She cried in outrage and tried to bat the thing away, but her hands sailed through its body, never connecting. It joined its fellows jostling over the Doctor's body (he was gripping her shoulders now, holding her) settling for a spot just above his hip. She watched it, helpless, then threw down her arms.

'All right, I'm fine now, OK?' She stood still, breathing deeply. 'Sorry,' she managed.

'Don't be.'

She shut her eyes again, and broken glass crunched under her shoes as the Doctor led her forward into the house.

***

Maria knew she should move, knew she should run now, get help. That would be the correct thing to do in the situation. But she looked at Charles, his idiot body, and could only mourn. She realised somewhere that it was as much for herself as for him.

Suddenly, from lying sprawled on the floor, Watson and Lucy somehow raised themselves into a standing position. It wasn't possible - it was crazy, as if someone had run a film backwards of them falling over. Kreiner and Waller were acting like marionettes with someone tugging on their strings. They'd get her, she knew. They'd show no mercy. They could do anything to her.

When the realisation in her clouded brain finally made her turn to run, she found she could not. She wondered if that was why Watson had started to smile.

***

Fitz saw four legs. Two of them were wearing grey trousers and battered brown shoes, the other two were pale and slim. Nice calves, quite muscular. Thin ankles.

He clambered out from under the writing desk. Sam jumped at the noise he made, while the Doctor looked at him quizzically.

'God, am I ever pleased to see you two,' said Fitz. 'Sam, you escaped!' She still had her eyes closed. 'Sam?'

'Yeah, Fitz. With a single bound I was free.'

He was obviously looking at her, but she doubted even a letch like him would get much of a thrill from the state of her. 'Is that where they shot you? Hey, what happened to your neck?' She didn't answer, and so he asked the Doctor. 'Is she sleepwalking or something?'

'Later,' said the Doctor. 'Fitz, what's been happening here?'

***

Russell and the old woman had risen to join Watson and Lucy. Maria still found herself rooted to the spot.

'What do you think of our handiwork, then, Nurse Bulwell?' asked Watson, gesturing at Roley.

'You're sick,' she snapped. 'Twisted. God will have no mercy on your souls.'

'Why, Nurse Bulwell!' Watson chided. 'Whatever makes you think we'd wish Him to?'

'You'll wish Him to,' she promised.

'Non, merci,' said Lucy, sticking her tongue out. 'Do you get it, Davydd? No mercy!'

'It's our mercy you should be worried about, Maria Bulwell,' said Watson, ignoring Lucy.

'You don't frighten me,' said Maria.

'We'll have to try harder,' said Lucy.

***

'I don't like the sound of this,' said the Doctor. 'And Maria went after Roley?'

Fitz nodded. 'A few minutes ago.'

The Doctor looked at Fitz, his voice a little harsher. 'Let's not waste any more time in here then, hmm?'

'One thing, Doctor.' Fitz stopped him. 'You haven't got a ciggy, have you? I'm gasping.'

Fitz found himself talking to no one, and, with a last look at the shattered windows, followed the Doctor and Sam out of the room.

***

'Ah!' Watson cried. 'It seems we have more company. The return of the Doctor and his wandering friend.'

Fitz stayed very much in the background, letting the Doctor and Sam push ahead. The Doctor checked that Maria was OK, then knelt by Roley, who seemed to be having convulsions on the floor. Fitz placed the scream he'd heard in context and shuddered. He noticed that while Watson was watching the Doctor, and Lucy was eyeing Sam by Maria's side, his mum and Russell were both looking straight at him. He mouthed 'Mum!' at her, but she simply stared, her face impassive and grey, like wrinkled stone.

The Doctor was all but ignoring the four of them in their little line in front of the door as he loosened Roley's collar.

'You killed Cynthia,' he said. 'Why?'

Russell shrugged. 'Why not?'

The Doctor glared at him. 'She did nothing to you.'

Russell smiled. 'So she deserved it.'

'And Roley?'The Doctor looked down again at the man in his arms.

'Can't he tell you what's wrong?' asked Watson. 'Oh, my. The poor devil seems to have lost his mind.'

'This was your work,' said the Doctor, standing up and facing them.

'Yours too, Doctor,' said Lucy. 'Your box upstairs gave us the information we needed.'

The Doctor marched forward to Watson. 'Put him right,' he said. 'Now.'

Watson laughed in the Doctor's face. 'It took a lot out of us to do that to him.' He yawned for effect.

'Do it,' said the Doctor, quietly.

Watson smiled at him, indulgently. 'Even if we wanted to, we wouldn't know how.'

'You're acting like destructive children,' stormed the Doctor. 'Whatever powers you're finding within yourselves, you must control them. You must use them for -'

The Doctor suddenly gasped and clutched his ears.

'Russell, Muriel, my dear,' Watson said. 'Hold our friend the Doctor.'

They did so, gripping him by the arms. Fitz noticed Maria totter backward as if finally able to move from under their scrutiny. Then her legs twisted under her and she fell to the floor. He ran over to her.

'You all right?' he asked.

'Can't move my legs,' said Maria, banging her fist on the floor.

Fitz was able to pull her a little further away, and got a cushion for her, listening all the while as Sam took on the others.

'Let go of the Doctor,' said Sam.

'Why?' said Lucy, fingering a curl of the Doctor's hair. 'I think I might want him.'

'Well, you can't have him.'

'Can't I?'

'No one can,' Sam said. 'Least of all a dried-up old cow like you.'

'Go, Sam!' muttered Fitz to himself.

Lucy angrily marched over to Sam, then stopped. Confusion, then alarm, spread over her face. 'Davydd?' she called to him. 'I can't... I can't...'

The Doctor pulled himself free of Russell and Mrs Kreiner, who were suddenly looking distressed, and backed away to stand at Sam's side. 'Can't what, exactly?' asked the Doctor, apparently genuinely curious.

Watson too was looking alarmed, deflated even, his veneer of urbane command peeling away. 'It's her!' he cried, looking at Sam. 'It's her!'

'What's he talking about, Doctor?"

The Doctor clicked his fingers. 'Of course!' he cried. 'Maria! Tranquillisers, quickly.'

'I can't move,' Bulwell moaned."They've crippled me!'

The Doctor thought hard.'All right, one thing at a time... Fitz, give me a hand with Roley.'

As Fitz walked nervously over to the Doctor, his mother fell to her knees.

'Fitzie, my darling,' croaked his mum. 'Help me. Take me away from here, help me get better.'

'Don't listen to her,' snapped the Doctor. 'It's not your mother talking. The devil consciousness has taken hold.'

'But why?' asked Fitz, staring helplessly at his mother. 'How can she just...?'

'The leeches aren't operating correctly. These poor people are sick, your mother included; their minds are confused.'

'Don't try to patronise us, Doctor,' snarled Watson, clutching hold of Lucy for support. 'We know just what we're doing, and just what we're going to do to the likes of you.'

The Doctor flashed him a tight smile. 'Not right now you're not, not with Sam here.'

'Doctor... Why? ' Sam asked with weary patience, her eyes open now, concentrating on Lucy.

"The program's been implemented with higher efficiency in your head. The psychic resonances from your leech must be confusing their own.'

'Crosstalk?' asked Sam.

'Spirited discussion, anyway,' said the Doctor, grinning. 'Fitz, you take his legs.' Together they dragged Roley, weakly protesting, over to Maria. Fitz saw the tears in her eyes, but could think of nothing to say.

'Make him as comfortable as you can,' the Doctor instructed. 'Maria, I've got to fetch the paraldehyde. Where is it?'

'You can't leave me here!' protested Sam, and Watson laughed.

'As far as the leeches are concerned, your brain is the most civilised among us,' said the Doctor, urgently. 'It's holding sway. You don't have to do anything - just stand there and hold them till I get back.'

'The stuff's stored next to the Restraint Room,' Maria muttered. The Doctor was gone in a moment.

***

Azoth caressed the back of Taylor's head, his ancient sensors massaging

clusters of neurons, generating new proteins and transmitting new instructions.

The human brain should have been simple to augment, but it was as if the energy that had finally found its way to his memory core had left his other functions still further degraded. Motor functions were failing, and visual inputs had shut down all together. Azoth felt no fear at the prospect of non-operation, only concern that he should not fail in his task. He had no way of knowing how many others of his kind were still functioning across the universe. It had never been intended that the fluid droids would last for ever. They had been given self-renewing circuitry, backups and fail-safes. Even so, there had to come a time when the last safeguards failed and entropy set in irreversibly.

The Beast were organic, self-replicating. But Azoth was determined he would outlive them on this battleground.

He wasn't sure for how long his mind had wandered. The fear flared up once more, and he concentrated again on the task, and the mind, in hand.

***

Sam was sure her opponents were getting stronger. She felt a bit like William G. Stewart in Fifteen to One - they'd begun fanning out, stumbling and swaying but somehow forming a loose semicircle around her, with Watson on one end and Russell on the other. Their faces were contorted, but whether in pain or concentration she didn't know. The Beast were swarming over them all, so the Doctor was right about the program not working. Then again, it wasn't exactly knocking them off her, was it? Her head throbbed - she felt a bit useless, as if standing here wasn't really enough. Come on, Doctor.

Suddenly, Lucy stepped just a little closer. 'Please, Sam,' she said, her eyes Bambi-wide in her pale face. 'Don't do this. I've never had anything worth holding on to; I don't want to lose this.'

Sam glanced at the others, to check she wasn't being deliberately distracted, but they seemed to be just the same, bent over slightly as if sick, their faces pale and pasty.

'Look at you,' Sam said. 'You really think this is worth hanging on to?'

Lucy whistled through her teeth. 'You don't know what I can do.'

'I know it's wrong. Doing stuff like this to people -'

She snorted. 'People have done stuff tome all my life.'

'You've been sick,' Sam persisted.

Mrs Kreiner whined and lashed out at her. Sam instinctively took a step back, and the others took one forward towards her.

'Fitz, help me watch them,' she shouted. 'The Doctor will be back in a minute. They're going to try something.'

'Gotcha,' called Fitz behind her, feebly.

'I've never been allowed to be happy, never,' said Lucy, morosely.

'Hurting other people shouldn't -'

'Oh, hark at you,' said Lucy. 'Standing there all lily-white, full of the milk of human kindness, full of good ... "God is love" - that's what the Bible says, isn't it? "And those that live in love, live in God"?' She spat on the floor. 'Well, I've never known love.'

'You're breaking my heart,' said Sam.

'And I hate God,' she said, edging forward. It was as if the words gave her strength. 'Hate Him and all He stands for!'

Sam met her gaze, saw the hate there, but wouldn't let herself flinch. 'I'm not even sure there is a God,' she said. 'But what good does it do blaming Him for your crappy life, anyway?'

'I'm not interested in good,' Lucy muttered.

Sam turned to Watson. 'What about you, then? You're a bit quiet for a change, aren't you, big man?'

Watson, still doubled up, looked at her. 'Oh, you'll hear me when I decide to speak, girl,' he said. 'I can promise you that.'

'Look out, Sam,' Fitz warned. She broke away from Watson's gaze and saw Mrs Kreiner, reaching out for her again, tottering forward. Sam took another step back, and the old woman snarled at her.

'Ohhhhh, no !' said Lucy. 'No, no, no...' Sam realised the woman was looking past her at something, seething with frustration. Was this a trick?

'Don't look round, Sam, I'm back.'

Sam's heart leapt at the Doctor's voice. Mrs Kreiner joined in with Lucy's whimpering and Russell gave vent to his anger by stamping on the floor. Only Watson didn't react, composed and quiet at the end of their line.

'Help me, Fitz!' called the Doctor.

She saw Fitz holding his mum while the Doctor administered an injection. The three figures were so overridden with Beast that it made her vision swim. Then she blinked, hard, as something that wasn't quite a pain hit the back of her head; she could only describe it as the elastic going in her mind.

The Doctor had moved round to Russell, who was yelling and cursing God as the sedative kicked in. She felt a rush of blood from her nose, and feared for a moment that her brain was pouring out.

'I'm sure I'm not meant to feel like this,' she said, but the Doctor was busy injecting Lucy, who was bawling like a grounded schoolgirl. At least, she thought that was happening, but it was hard to be sure.

First Sam went blind, then she collapsed.

***

'Sam!' yelled the Doctor, dashing over to her fallen body.

That left Fitz hanging on to Watson alone, before he'd been given the

paraldehyde. 'Doctor, what about...?' He braced himself for a struggle, gripped the man as strongly as he could, but, even though Sam seemed out for the count, Watson showed no sign of fighting back. In fact, he seemed to have fallen asleep already, his eyes tightly closed, fists clenched.

***

Taylor moaned and stirred on Azoth's operation couch. His head was hurting like hell, as if there were a big bluebottle in it trying to get out.

He couldn't open his eyes. They felt swollen, squeezed into their sockets, boiling under his eyelids. Something stank in the air, something rank and sulphurous, hurting him to breathe, but he felt in some way it was good - as though he were taking badness inside himself, then spitting it back out. He felt stronger, somehow, even though he hurt so badly.

All he could hear was an insistent buzzing.That'11 be the bluebottle, he thought, but the buzzing was intermittent, loud and soft, on and off, like Morse code, or a military tattoo. No, it was talking. Like something was calling to him...

Heat flooded into his head, and his brain felt like butter melting in a pan. The words were getting louder. He shouldn't be hearing them: something else was taking place - the bad smell and the breathing told him that - and he knew he shouldn't be distracted.

6.5

'Catch.'

Fitz caught the syringe from the Doctor. 'What do you expect me to do with this?' He asked in disbelief.

'Use it.'

'Sorry, I only ingest stuff orally.'

'On him.'

Fitz looked down at Watson, lying in his lap, and grimaced. 'Where do I need to -'

'Anywhere!' yelled Bulwell from across the room. 'Just stick it in him.'

Fitz took a deep breath and injected it into Watson's arm. Only when the plunger had forced out the colourless liquid did he breathe again. By that time the Doctor was walking past him, carrying Sam up the stairs.

'Where are you taking her?' Fitz asked.

'My lab,' said the Doctor, not turning round. 'I've got to find out what's wrong.'

'Was it the strain of fighting this lot off?'

'I don't know,' said the Doctor, sounding more like a helpless boy than the superman who had confronted these maniacs.

'What about Charles?' Maria shouted, miserably. 'Are you not going to help him?'

'Fitz, bring him along,' the Doctor called over his shoulder without looking back.

'And what about Cynthia, eh?'

Fitz rounded on her. 'Didn't you hear them? She's dead. There's nothing we can do for her.'

'And what about me ? Maria bawled, smacking her dead legs.

***

By the time Fitz had found his way to the ramshackle laboratory, the Doctor was already flicking switches and powering up equipment. Sam was lying on the table, looking deathly pale in the flickering light of a Bunsen burner. The mark on her neck was like a cigar burn, and the gunshot wound in her shoulder was looking pretty unpleasant too. Poor cow. So much for living life.

'Where do you want him?' he asked, nodding at Roley in his arms. Maria had told him to give Roley a quick jab too, and it had knocked the poor sod right out.

'Erm... ' The Doctor looked round, frantically. 'On the floor, for now.'

Fitz duly laid the man out. 'How long does that stuff work for?'

'Should keep them out for a good few hours. I hope.'

Fitz balked. 'And then?'

The Doctor laid a cradle of wires over Sam's head. 'One thing at a time, Fitz.'

'And what about Nurse Bulwell? She can't walk.'

The Doctor rounded on him, and Fitz took a step backward. 'One thing at a time .'

Fitz ran his hand through his straggly hair. 'Right. I suppose she can keep an eye on them downstairs.' He realised the Doctor wasn't even listening, still fussing around with wires and connections. 'Look, don't you want the light on?' he asked.

'Good thought. Yes, please,' said the Doctor.

Fitz flicked the switch but the only result was a low whirring from one of the gadgets next to Sam. A pale-yellow glow illuminated her face, coming from a row of small lamps in the metal housing. Fitz glanced up at the light socket and saw that the bulb had been replaced by a thick cable, bound there with string.

'What are you doing?' Fitz asked, in wonder.

'I've never attempted soul catching with beings not fully in phase with this dimension,' said the Doctor. 'But in theory it's possible, I'm sure.'

'What beings? In what theory?'

'The Beast. Not so much body-snatchers as body-suckers,' said the Doctor. 'Using the neuronic re-rendering data constructed in this simulation unit by the leech, I can partially remodel some of my own synapses, at least enough to help me talk to them.'

'Course you can,' said Fitz.

'Psychic surgery, some call it. Of course, Sam will help too,she's already interacting with them. Hence these connections...'

'You need help, all right, mate,' said Fitz. 'What are you talking about, "body-suckers"?'

'Fitz,' said the Doctor, 'why don't you check that Maria's comfortable? I'm sure her condition is only short-term.'

'And what about his condition?' asked Fitz, indicating Roley. 'What about my mum?'

The Doctor looked at him.

'I know,' said Fitz. 'One thing at a time.'

***

Maria was fuming by the time Fitz got downstairs. He peered down at his mother and gingerly patted her wrist, oddly relieved by her lack of response.

'Well?' asked Maria. 'What have they done to him?'

'Roley?' Fitz said, squatting down beside her. 'Dunno. The Doctor hasn't looked at him yet.'

'Well, what's he doing?'

Fitz thought of the Doctor, a fury of flapping coat-tails and trailing wires.'He thinks Sam's in trouble.'

'Girl's just fainted, I expect. But Charles.

'One thing at a time,' Fitz said, nodding sagely at this profundity.

'One thing at a time, indeed,' muttered Maria. 'Oh yes. And he decides which order they're dealt with, doesn't he? It's always his agenda he's bothered with and never mind the rest of us.'

'Well, he seems to know what he's doing.' Fitz smiled faintly. 'Except when it comes to buying flowers...'

'Dead. That's what they all deserve to be.' She nodded over in the direction of Watson and the others.

'Oi,' said Fitz. "That's my mother you're talking about.'

'Well...' said Maria. 'It's you I feel sorry for.' She looked at him as if sizing him up. 'There's bad blood in you, Fitz Kreiner, though you can't choose your parents, God knows.'

'She's sick, that's all,' Fitz said, defensively.

Mafia looked away. 'Yes, well... I wasn't talking about that.'

Fitz stood up, shaking his head. 'My dad was a German. He wasn't a Nazi.'

'They're all Nazis,' she snapped. 'Everyone knows that.'

'I think you'll find everyone knows the war ended eighteen years ago, Nurse Bulwell.'

'No thanks to your sort.'

'Oh, for God's sake,' said Fitz walking away.

'She'd have been all right if she'd stayed with her own!' Maria yelled at him. 'She wouldn't have turned out a twisted old woman!'

'That much better to be a lonely old woman, is it, Maria?'

Fitz heard her wailing as he stalked off back up the stairs. For a moment, he thought about apologising. Only for a moment.

***

The Doctor held his hands out over Sam. The last time he'd tried something like this it had been with a Waro - a bit like having a ferret give you a love bite. It had rather put him off the experience.

Even so, he had to find out more about the nature of this program if he was to stand a chance of making her well again. 'Stay with me, Sam,' he whispered to her. 'I need you on line...'

The hum of the various machines helped him concentrate, gave him a reference point as he began to slip away inside himself. He allowed intuition coupled with good old-fashioned mathematical certainty to help him reroute his own mind along the lines of the simulator. He had to hope then that Sam was fit enough to act as a conduit for the Beast. Only then could he communicate with them, to learn not only their purpose but also how badly Sam had been affected.

Focus... focus... The number of different permutations that Sam's ten billion brain cells could take would need a line of figures almost eighteen miles long to describe it. He knew: he'd written it out, once. He began to recite the figure, clearing his mind of everything but the calculation, and now he was travelling along that line of numbers standing proud like soldiers, mile

after mile of them, jostling between digits and dendrites, swimming in streams of chemical transmitters, reaching out his consciousness to interact not with Sam's but with those who were gathered around her.

leave us. we feed

He heard himself speak the words, as if listening to someone else.

'You're the Beast?'

They so named us, once

It seemed to take lifetimes for the creatures to reply. He wondered if they were using Sam's brain to process the meaning of his questions. He felt the words he was delivering were more an impression of meaning than the actual words they used, and in between the syllables came a flurry of piecemeal understanding.

warmth, life, nourishment, survive

They were like bedbugs, fleas or head lice; simply doing what they did. They happened to do it on a pan-dimensional scale. The Doctor knew then that the Benelisans were wrong. The Beast weren't evil - they lacked the calculating intelligence for malice.

now They have found us, They will kill us again

'You feel that?'

we have not yet enough energy to move on to new hosts. They always find us. They despise us

'They think you destroyed their race.'

the holes in the sky kitted them when They appeared, we go through the holes in the sky. They were few, we were many

It was probably expecting too much of a flea that it should grasp interdimensional shift phenomena. 'A low population cannot support you?' asked the Doctor.

we feed, when fed, we go

'Unless the exterminators arrive,' said the Doctor. He was quite surprised when the Beast signalled their understanding of his obscure reference.

this mind is poisoned with their taint, but it is slow, and she is but one

The Doctor didn't understand. 'Sam's mind is slow?'

slow-poisoned.

A long pause. Then, another flurry of feelings and words.

fear. panic, the dark...

The Doctor started as if waking from a nightmare, losing contact with the Beast. His hands scraped along Sam's face as he did so, one of his nails nicking her skin. He covered his mouth as a scratch turned red, looked at her lying there, her face cold and damp.

'Sam. I'm so... Sam...'

He didn't even know what he was trying to say. The last intelligible words of the Beast before he'd been slipped out of contact were everywhere in his head. His voice couldn't articulate them.

she dies before us

***

The Doctor was just standing there when Fitz got back up to the lab. He'd only returned because he hadn't really known where else to go.

'Thought Sam might like some water,' said Fitz, waving a glass in the air. 'How's she doing?'

'Not well,' said the Doctor. 'I think she's dying and I've no idea what I can do to save her.' He thought hard, his eyes bright blue and intense. 'If I could formulate some kind of counter-retrovirus to restore the augmented DNA

cells...'

'What?' Fitz began. 'I mean, how...?'

The Doctor shook his head, despairingly. "There's a leech in her now, clumsily activated by a machine that didn't really know what it was doing. I can only assume her mind wasn't ready for the assault.'

'What about that business downstairs?' He looked down at the floor. 'You know, my mum and the others.'

'I doubt that helped: He looked at her again, touched her hand. 'It could be that more energy was exchanged between them than the leech could handle.'

'Will this happen to my mum?' wondered Fitz.

'That, or something like that,' the Doctor said, quite casually. 'Her mind - along with the leech she's carrying - has become part of a circuit, connected to Watson and the others, amplifying their psychoses and releasing some pretty formidable powers.'

'The scary stuff, in other words,' said Fitz, glumly.

The Doctor held Fitz's arm for a moment. 'I'm afraid your mother is a very sick woman,' he said, before busying himself disconnecting Sam from his lash-up.

'Sick...?'

'Certainly, certainly,' the Doctor answered.

Fitz realised the Doctor was only half listening, frantically freeing wires and cables, feeling for Sam's pulse every few seconds. But even talking at all was better than standing here in this brooding silence. He looked at Roley, still lying dishevelled on the floor, and shuddered. The thought that his mum could be capable of something like that...

'Bulwell reckons it's all down to Mum marrying a German,' he said, quietly, shaking his head. 'Bad blood...'

'Rubbish,' the Doctor answered, vaguely. Then suddenly he stopped what he was doing. 'What did you say?'

'Bad blood?'

'Of course!' The Doctor's voice was full of anxious excitement. 'You may have a leech in you, passed on from your mother!'

Fitz felt sick. 'Jesus!' he whispered. 'I never...'

'Let me see. Come on, quick!' The Doctor was already beside him, pulling at his collar, trying to feel for the telltale lump that would give the thing away.

'Steady!' said Fitz, unbuttoning his shirt so he wasn't choked to death.

'It's there,' said the Doctor. 'It's in you, too.' The Doctor had scooped up a scalpel from the bench. 'Well, we've got to get it out of you, haven't we?'

Fitz felt even sicker. 'What, without an anaesthetic? You can't just -'

'We've got to get it out now ', insisted the Doctor.

'You think it could start up? That I'll go mental?'

'Possibly.' The Doctor was suddenly snifty. 'I need it. It could help me generate a cure for Sam.'

Fitz nodded to himself, remembering Maria's words. It's always his agenda he's bothered with, he thought.

He held the Doctor's wrist, halting the movement of the scalpel. The Doctor looked at him in surprise.

And never mind the rest of us.

'One thing at a time, Doctor, remember?' said Fitz. 'Slow down.'

The Doctor looked a little sheepish for a moment, then rushed over to a

crate in the corner of the room, and began rifling through its contents. 'Here we are. Tranquilliser pad. You won't feel a thing.' The Doctor rummaged some more. 'And look!' He brandished a slim, black knife. 'Intelligent blade. Helps the cut flesh knit back together. You won't even scar.' The Doctor gave him a hopeful smile, like a child seeking permission to open his birthday presents early.

Fitz pulled his shirt down around his arms. 'Just get on with it,' he said.

***

Maria could feel pins and needles in her legs, and had never been more grateful for such discomfort. She managed to get on her knees, then, leaning heavily on the back of a chair, she managed to sit down, massaging her thighs and calves.

She glanced over at the scum that had done this to her, and a low moan escaped her lips.

She'd seen Watson and Lucy as they collapsed, some feet apart. Now, apparently still sleeping deeply, they were holding hands.

Furiously, she began rubbing her legs again, concentrating on getting the wretched things working again. She had to get out of here, walk out of here. Then something had to be done about this lot once and for all.

***

Fitz grimaced as he moved his right arm around in its joint and felt the wound on his shoulder being pulled. It hurts when I do this,' he complained.

'Don't do that, then,' said the Doctor.

'Funny man.' Fitz shuddered as the Doctor placed the leech in a jar full of saline solution, grateful at least that the thing was out of him now. Suddenly, he noticed the other leech in its dish of congealed blood.

'What's wrong with that one, anyway?'

'Dead,' the Doctor replied curtly, emptying an impossible amount of

equipment into his case. Fitz didn't blink an eye. 'Watson must've damaged it when he drained my machine here for the information on Roley's brain. It was still trying to reformat the simulated neurons for activation of the program.' The machine, too, fitted mysteriously inside.

'So why are you packing up?' asked Fitz. 'I thought you were going to whiz up some potion to -'

'I'm not a magician, Fitz,' said the Doctor, now lifting the case as if it weighed nothing at all. 'It could take days, or weeks, to find the answer.'

'Sam doesn't have that long, right?'

The Doctor looked grave. 'Right. So I'm going back to the people who did this to her, to find out what exactly it was they did do to her.'

'You're going there now?'

'In the TARDIS. Take this for me.'

Fitz took the offered case. It really did weigh nothing at all. 'The TARDIS. That's your police box, isn't it?' he said.

He nodded as he scooped Sam up in his arms. 'Come on, quickly.'

'What about Roley?' asked Fitz. 'What about my mum?'The Doctor ignored him and carried Sam out of the door. Fitz shouted after him. 'Doctor!'

The Doctor turned, agitated, and spoke very quickly to him. 'Whatever these people did to Sam, they're responsible for your mother's state as well. If we're to stand a chance of helping anyone here, we need their knowledge. Otherwise, we're just stumbling round in the dark.'

Fitz slouched along behind him. 'I never used to be scared of the dark,' he said.

***

Maria could crawl now; it hurt, but she could do it. She'd dragged that dark-haired witch away from her boyfriend again and was heaving herself slowly

up the stairs.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps approaching. Before she'd had time to react, the Doctor was practically jumping over her to get past, Sam in his arms, Fitz right behind him.

'Where are you going?' she demanded. 'Have you left Charles alone up there?'

'We're... we're getting help,' said Fitz.

'What kind of help?' Maria was suspicious. "The police?'

'No,' called the Doctor, peering at the front door. It was still welded shut. "That's the worst thing we could do.'

'We're going to find the people that started this whole thing in the first place,' Fitz explained.

'Oh, I see. Going to invite them round to tea, are you? Going to show them how well everything's turned out thanks to them, are you?' Fitz turned away, giving up on her. 'It's not fair: you're helping her and not Charles,' Maria insisted. 'My legs are getting better. Charles could get better, too.'

'Your paralysis was only suggested by Watson and the others,' said the Doctor, straining to keep calm. 'Once their influence was taken away you regained feeling in the nerves and muscles.' He shook his head, sadly. 'I suspect the damage to Roley's mind was very real. The brain can't just bounce back from something like that.'

With that, the Doctor made for the direction of the drawing room.

'And you're just going to let them get away with it, are you?' she yelled after him.

'We'll be back soon with knowledge that can help them,' were the Doctor's last words as he and Fitz vanished from sight. Then he popped back round the corner. 'If Fitz carries Sam as well as my case, perhaps I could carry -'

'Forget it,' Maria bristled. She imagined the embarrassment of his trying to lift her, and Charles alone in the house with these animals.

'Be careful,' said the Doctor, anxiously glancing down at Sam again as he vanished from view once more. 'I'll be back!' he called to her. 'Trust me!'

Trust him? When he'd leave Charles for dead but run off to get help for them and his little friend?

There was something she could do here. If no one else was going to make these lunatics pay for what they'd done, she'd damn well do it herself.

Painfully slowly, she began to manoeuvre herself back down the stairs.

***

The TARDIS was big when it ought to be little. That was all Fitz could think of. But, then, the case he'd been carrying was little when it ought to be big. Same difference, he guessed.

Even so, it took some taking in. He'd imagined the Doctor and Sam squashed in a box taking off into space, he supposed, if he'd imagined anything at all. He'd started believing in it all only when he'd realised the Doctor was deadly serious about taking Sam, and himself, inside the police box for a trip to Bethnal Green, each step over the wet grass in the hard rain bringing the moment of truth nearer, dragging his heart closer to his mouth.

Now here he was, and the Doctor was already flicking switches and pulling brass levers on a wooden control panel. There were no chattering computer banks with big reels of tape attached, no blinking flashing lights or portholes in smooth metal bulkheads. Instead, everything was wood and brass, with a wall full of unreturned library books and a couple of statues dotted about. As spaceships went, while not exactly a disappointment, it didn't feel quite right.

'But will it fly?' Fitz said, wryly.

'It's all a little less ostentatious than that,' said the Doctor, yanking down a

monitor on a coiled steel spring and tapping numbers in using what looked a bit like an old typewriter.

'So I notice. Anyway, how are you going to find this place?'

'We know where we're looking, now, thanks to Sam. And their locational shielding effect can't fool us any longer after my exertions in town today. The TARDIS can now ignore the extraneous signals and hopefully land right on their doorstep.'

A strange, metallic grating started up, and Fitz felt a tingling in the pit of his stomach. 'What was that?'

'Take-off,' muttered the Doctor.

'But I only just got here.'

The Doctor ignored him, and walked over to the big red armchair Sam was curled up in. He blew softly into a wooden recorder. A mournful rendition of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' sounded around the echoing room.

'Give me that,' said Fitz. 'I object to the slaughter of innocent tunes.' He played a coruscating eddy of notes up and down the scales, finishing with a quick rendition of the chorus of 'Please Please Me'.

The Doctor stared at him, agog. Then he snatched back the recorder and returned to the control panel. 'Rubbish,' he said.

***

Azoth suddenly shook into activity. He could detect the shrieking and groaning of the dimensions wrestling with each other to allow something through.

The Taylor unit was now repaired, but Azoth had known it would take some time for the human to recover. In that time, Azoth had gathered again the grains of his past, and remembered his masters, his original functioning, the beginnings of his existence. But then, once again, his motor circuits had died and his mind had lapsed.

Jolted back to the present by the disturbance, he discerned a large, blue box appearing in the corner of the chamber. He recognised it from a blur of Sam's thoughts: it was a travelling device, disguising itself as his own did. It could take its occupants anywhere in space and time.

Thoughts began to coalesce in his circuitry.

***

Maria had fought her way back to the bottom of the stairs, the pain in her legs and the image of Charles flailing about on the floor fuelling her anger.

When she crawled into the hallway she saw that Lucy had somehow made her way back to Watson and the two of them were holding hands again.

It didn't even surprise her this time. It was like stamping on a cockroach that refused to give up and die. But this time she'd really fix them. Now, while she was alone. And hang the consequences. She didn't care any more. What was there left to care about?

She dragged herself towards the large, leather medical bag.

***

'Stay here, if you like,' said the Doctor, lifting Sam into his arms.

'I like,' said Fitz, instantly.

'I've got to face them. You can watch me on the scanner.'

Fitz looked. It was a colour TV, probably from America. He glanced over at the Doctor, who was looking grim.

'Fitz... If I don't come back...'

He swallowed. 'Yes?'

'There's a metronome in one of the cabinets at the back there. It'll help you keep time.' He tutted, and went through the TARDIS doors. 'Your rhythm was terrible...'

***

Azoth felt the man emerge. It was like a winter breeze blowing into the cave. His biochemistry was alien, a mass of contradictions and secrets. Like the girl, he didn't belong here in this time and place.

'Hello,' the man said. 'I'm the Doctor, and I believe you know my friend Sam. She's dying and I need you to help her.'

'The program is not functioning in her,' Azoth said. 'I undertook insufficient analysts of her deoxyribonucleic acid for long-term program stability.'

'Then undertake it now.'

***

Fitz saw the anger on the Doctor's face, and wondered what was being said to the full-sized Oscar statuette in the crystalline room. He hunted around the monitor for a volume control.

***

'I can repair her. But there is no need,' Azoth replied. "The program now functions correctly in this unit.' He gestured at Taylor on the couch.

'If you've cured him, cure her!'

'The program requires time before activation. It is neither efficient nor necessary to repair her.'

'Who are you to say what's necessary?' the Doctor raged.

***

Who are you , Doctor? thought Fitz sadly. The Doctor was laying Sam down on the floor, taking off his coat and bundling it under her head as a pillow. Fitz watched him, gloomily, then noticed something in the top corner of the screen. A body, crumpled and discarded. It was Tarr.

'Now, how do I feel about that?' he wondered.

***

'My programming dictates reason, 'Azoth answered.

'This ridiculous crusade against the Beast,' railed the Doctor. 'How long have you been here, "dictating reason", eh?'

'The year 1822 was the first.'

'I'm not surprised the DNA in your test cases is a little overcooked.'

'My functions were impaired,' Azoth drawled, his voice circuits seemingly losing still more power. 'Only recently did I revive.'

'Of course...' The Doctor nodded. 'When Roley obligingly gathered so many of your specimens under one roof. The proximity resonances those dormant programs triggered off must've been quite a wake-up call.'

'Further experiments are unnecessary. When activated, the Taylor unit will be fully functional.'

'Yes, so you say, and not very well, I might add,' the Doctor said, pacing around the cavern. 'But isn't it going to take him rather a long time to pluck the Beast from every living thing on this planet?'

'Subjects cannot visualise the Beast. That would cause panic and disruption. That is unnecessary and against programming.'

The Doctor was bristling with impatience waiting for Azoth to get out his words. 'Sam can see them.'

'Sam's program functions incorrectly.'

'Like Austen's...' whispered the Doctor. 'She can only perceive the Beast - the interface isn't total.' Being able to see the creatures was obviously only one of many possible side effects of the program's corruption - the others weren't suffering from that particular curse, but there was hardly a shortage of evidence suggesting they were suffering mental damage. The Doctor

found himself clenching his fists. 'It's not just her. A man is dead and four others are in danger, thanks to your ham-fisted experimentation.'

'Multiple units are utilised for running the correct program where possible. The program then spreads exponentially.'

'So it's communicable,' the Doctor said. 'I should've guessed. What is it, a chemical transmitter generated by the leech, spread by contact?'

Azoth said nothing, and a thought occurred to the Doctor. 'Why are you telling me so much, anyway?'

'I seek your help, Doctor.'

'You won't give me yours.'

'I will. In return for the service of your vessel.'

The Doctor said nothing.

Azoth tried again. 'I am old, Doctor. Infinitely old. My functioning slips from me. My covering of flesh has fallen away; I can no longer accomplish my task by stealth.' The words were tumbling out of him, speeding up; he knew he sounded desperate. 'I will repair Sam, and the other injured units, if you take me, and the Taylor unit, back in time. Let us implement the program at a point before the Beast arrive here so their taint will never be felt. Let us save humanity.'

'No.' The Doctor was emphatic. "The Beast are not murderers. Only on worlds with a population too small to support their numbers are the results of their infestation in any way dangerous.'

'We can journey throughout the universe in your vessel and save all life from their scourge.'

'We can't,' said the Doctor. 'Time travel doesn't work that way. Nor can we go back to Benelisa and save it from destruction, so don't even ask me to -'

'The girl will die without my care, Doctor.'

***

Fitz could hardly take in the drama unfolding on the monitor, but he'd understood that last bit all right. His mum, Sam, all of them. They could be saved. How hard could it be to sort all that for Golden Boy in a time machine? He squinted at the screen, trying to make out the expression on the Doctor's face, but the resolution wasn't good enough.

'I'm aware of that; said the Doctor, softly, his voice barely caught by the TARDIS auditory circuits. 'But my answer is the same.

'No.'

***

Maria flicked the needle of the syringe to check for obstructions, then shook her head at the incongruity of doing so. Old habits died hard.

She stumbled over to the sprawled-out bodies in front of her, keen to do this before the feeling fully returned to her legs, while she was still suffering the harm they'd inflicted on her. She didn't need to check on Charles to know he'd still be the same. And she could only imagine how Cynthia had suffered, the effects of that dreadful crash they'd heard. That poor girl, lying cold and dead somewhere.

These people were evil. Murderers. They deserved to die.

'Who wants to be first?' she whispered.

They seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Well, there wouldn't be much peace where they were heading. Now she'd send them on their way.

Watson first, then Lucy. Their arms were still intertwined.

'Off you go,' she said softly, leaning forward and feeling for the thickest vein in Watson's wrist. 'Hand in hand, off to hell...'

***

Azoth reached out his arms to the Doctor.

'Please?' he said.

'Azoth, I cannot do what you ask!' The Doctor seemed pained. 'It is forbidden by every rule of -'

'You shall help me, Doctor.' Azoth lurched towards him. He heard the Doctor back away.

'Repair Sam, and we'll talk about it some more.'

'She will be repaired when you have taken us back.'

'Before we go back. I insist.'

Azoth continued to advance.

***

Fitz couldn't believe what a lousy bluffer the Doctor was. He couldn't act all outraged like that and then pretend he'd go along if he got his own way first. What he should've done -

He winced as he saw Azoth strike out and send the Doctor sprawling against one of the featureless grey banks of equipment that lined the cavern. The Doctor scrambled up, hopped over Sam, and tried to lead Golden Boy away from her, to stop her being trampled.

In so doing he came too near to avoid another swiping metal arm.

***

The blow knocked the Doctor back against an instrument panel, switches and meters bruising his back through his shirt. The main door activated, but the Doctor ignored it. What good would running do?

'Take me back; Azoth whirred. It sounded as if he'd swallowed a kazoo and was chewing a block of toffee.

'Heal Sam,' the Doctor replied. Surely Azoth would soon tire of this

impasse, once he'd realised he couldn't force the Doctor into helping him through violence and aggression.

He narrowly avoided another golden fist, and circled round the android again.

***

Taylor knew nothing of the struggle around him. He was too busy listening to the buzzing, urging him to return to the house, to get out of the death cave, to return to the house...

***

'Neither of us has time for this,' the Doctor cried as Azoth staggered towards him again. 'Your energy is almost exhausted. If you heal Sam and the others I will help you recharge yourself, restore your function.' Azoth wasn't listening. 'I can prove to you then the Beast are not evil, that -'

The Doctor realised that a blasphemy like that was clearly going too far. Azoth lashed out an arm in a blur and grabbed hold of him. The Doctor felt his ribs start to buckle. Then he was flung against the medi-couch that held Taylor, the force of his impact causing a shower of sparks and crystal to erupt in his face.

The Doctor cried out and fell backward on to Sam, clutching his eyes.

***

Fitz watched in terror as Taylor began shaking on the couch. It was as if he was being electrocuted.

'The activation is too soon!' said Azoth, his voice higher, as if he were in pain, too.

***

Taylor looked around him in dazed disbelief. It was the cave, the death cave. Then he recoiled from the presence of the angel from his dream.

'Keep away! Keep away or I'll kill you!' Taylor ran to the other side of the couch, putting it between him and the golden man.

'You will damage yourself,' the thing hissed at him. 'You are not ready. You will not function correctly.'

It reached out and flicked a switch. Taylor saw the big metal doors begin to close.

With a yell of defiance and fear he shoulder-charged the angel, sending him reeling into a wall.

'Azoth?' someone shouted. It was Roley's friend, the Doctor, lying on the floor with the girl, hiding his eyes, afraid.

A blue power was crackling around the angel. Its golden head was snaking, becoming blackened and tarnished. It screamed, a terrible noise, a noise worse than the flies that were still buzzing in his head.

Taylor stared around him, wildly, then realised the doors were still sliding shut. He ran through them and into the blackness, without another glance.

***

The Doctor rubbed his eyes. The skin felt tender about them, burnt. He couldn't see properly, he couldn't focus on Sam, so he felt for her pulse.

'Still there,' he muttered. 'Hold on, Sam, hold on.'

'The last...'Azoth's voice was little more than a whisper. 'Gone...'

There was a clattering. Was Azoth getting up, or falling down?

'Terminal solution...'

'What?' the Doctor shook his head, trying to clear it. 'What do you mean?'

'To destroy Beast... Ensure... total elimination of life... on Earth...'

'No!' The Doctor scrambled up. What was happening? "That's genocide thousands of times over!'

***

Fitz watched as the half-cooked golden man clambered up and dragged itself over to the Doctor. The thing was half wrecked, but by the look of it that wasn't going to stop it killing him. Just in the way it had killed the ancestor he'd never even known he'd had. And if the Doctor died now... what the hell would happen to Fitz Kreiner and his nearest and dearest?

'I've never had time for metronomes, Doctor,' he muttered, finding the switch for the doors and activating it.

***

The Doctor's sight was beginning to return. He realised that Azoth was about to deliver the killing blow.

'Wait!' shouted Fitz."The Beast, I feel their presence here!'

Azoth ground to a halt, then turned his blackened face towards Fitz. 'You... sense the Beast?'

Fitz nodded. 'Sure.' He began to act like a medium in a trance. 'I sense them, I sense them here, there, everywhere!'

'All right, don't milk it,' grumbled the Doctor.

'Then... 'nal solution... not 'ssary...'Azoth held out his hands and fell noisily to his knees, as if worshipping Fitz. 'Once lost... now...' He grasped his smouldering head. Now... nowhere... '

With a final hum of power and a noise like fireworks failing to go off. Azoth toppled forward and was still.

Fitz watched him for a few seconds, then collapsed to his own knees. 'Oh thank you, sweet Jesus Christ! Thank you, thank you, thank you.' He kissed the air, then looked at the Doctor. 'You all right?'

'We've got to stop Taylor,' the Doctor said, examining first Sam, then Azoth. He shook his head, and squinted at Fitz. 'Or rather, you have.'

'On your bike,' said Fitz.

'Listen to me,' the Doctor began, then broke off. 'Oh, there's no time, there's no time... I can't do it myself, I have to help Sam, retrieve the information I need from Azoth's head. Fitz, you follow Taylor and stop him.'

'What, to save your precious, crummy Beast?'

'Not only them, but your mother and countless other lives too.'

'Come off it!'

The Doctor grabbed his arm. "The program in Taylor's mind has been awakened too soon.'

'So? He's already potty, isn't he?'

'When Sam collapsed, Watson didn't struggle, did he? Even though there was nothing holding him.'

'Well, I-'

'I think he was too busy calling for help to notice,' the Doctor said, using his cravat to dab at his eyes. 'Do you know how an atom bomb works, Fitz?'

'Come off it. They're like women. It's hard enough coping with them, let alone understanding them.'

'Uranium 235 is an isotope, disintegrating continually because of its radioactivity. In small amounts this disintegration is a slow process, but if more is brought together, if critical mass is exceeded...'

'Boom?' offered Fitz.

'The disintegration accelerates massively: the pulses of energy thrown out by the atoms hit the nuclei of other atoms, disintegrating them; and these exploding atoms shoot out still more pulses of energy which hit still more

nuclei.'

'Which proves what?'

'The program, or the leech, is the isotope. While your mother and the others were apart, the metamorphosis of their brain cells proceeded slowly, creating only minor traumas - bouts of schizophrenia and so on. Bring them into contact with each other, stir them up as Roley did.

'And we've seen what happens,' Fitz said.

'We were lucky to stop the four of them, last time,' said the Doctor. 'I dread to think what will happen if Taylor joins them too.'

Fitz buried his face in his hands. "Then I suppose you're right. I'd better follow him.' A thought seemed to strike him, and he looked earnestly at the Doctor. 'Do you think I could have a ray gun?'

***

The needle punctured Watson's vein. Maria paused with her thumb on the plunger. One push, it would all be over.

Something grabbed hold of her hair and pulled hard.

Maria shrieked in surprise, and the syringe fell from her grasp. Lucy had hold of her, dragging her face up close to her own.

'You fat old bitch,' Lucy hissed, her eyes full of sleep and malice. 'I'll have your unloved heart out for this.'

Lucy released Maria, sending her sprawling backward. She half crawled, half staggered towards the passage that led to the drawing room, to the shattered windows, to freedom - but the door slammed in her face, trapping her in the hallway.

Lucy was saying nothing now, just staring at Maria with a kind of drunken concentration. Maria moved cautiously towards her. She could see the syringe, lying by the woman's feet. Had Lucy noticed it? Her eyes were still half focusing on Maria's own.

Well, if the little slut wanted a fight, she could have one.

Maria lunged for the syringe, but it skittered into Lucy's hand without her moving a muscle. The witch laughed, that annoying high-pitched squeal of hers, and dangled the syringe by the plunger in front of Maria's face.

***

The flick of a switch and the doors to the cavern opened, exposing the chill dark of the tunnel outside. The Doctor had found Fitz a gun - one Azoth must have used to stun his victims before doing his Frankenstein bit - but it didn't make him feel much better.

The Doctor was hauling Azoth into the TARDIS, having already collected a bizarre assortment of items from Golden Boy's torture chamber. I'll meet you back at the house.'

'It'll take me ages to get back from Bethnal Green!' moaned Fitz.

The Doctor ignored him. I'll work over there, check Maria's all right and keep an eye on things.'

Fitz thought. 'What if Taylor touches someone, spreads this bug to them?'

'Stun them. Try to isolate them.'

'Oh, no problem.'

'Stop talking and catch him, and he won't be able to touch anyone,' said the Doctor, carrying Sam through the police box's doors and slamming them shut behind him.

***

Maria backed away on all fours as Lucy held the syringe like a dart and aimed it at her.

Maria shut her eyes as the witch threw it.

No... Lucy was giggling. She'd only pretended to throw it. Now, as Maria watched, she took the syringe and made a great show of squirting the clear liquid into her mouth, swilling it around and then gulping it down with a triumphant laugh.

Maria stumbled away desperately, Lucy's laughter filling her ears, running, falling, scrambling back up again, painfully aware she had nowhere to go.

***

Fitz jogged along the tunnels, as softly as he could - he didn't want Taylor to hear him coming, and was straining to hear whether the man was up ahead. The stakes were high, the gun was warm in his hand. He if was James Bond.

Except he was Fitz Kreiner, and he was scared stupid.

The tunnel ended in a ladder. Fitz thought he could hear movement, and wondered what the range on his gun was.

***

The Doctor stood in the TARDIS, his face lined with worry. Understanding what the leech did was one thing; actually taking steps to reverse the process was quite another. And for any cure to stand a chance of working...

He thought about the last remedy he'd concocted for the improbable - the stuff he'd given Sam and Lunder back on Menda to cure their radiation sickness had taken weeks to perfect, while the TARDIS was parked nicely out of the way in a temporal orbit.

He'd known he was cheating. Twice now he'd pulled that trick - the last resort, the dismissal of destiny. But time could not be cheated too often, and he knew it. Why only now, in this lifetime, was it that things got so out of hand that he had to hide away in his ship to try to put them right? Had that transition from master planner to born-again novice of the universe so stripped him of his guile that he was left impotent to save those nearest to him?

He bunched up his fists. This wasn't helping Sam. Azoth had all the

answers. If he connected Azoth to the TARDIS data banks, downloaded his memory wafers...

The TARDIS flung itself energetically round the vortex on its way back to Roley's as the Doctor busied himself getting his hands dirty.

***

None of the doors and windows in the house would budge. Maria paced around the east wing, fiddling with the ends of her cardigan. She was trapped, with no way out. She needed to hide, she needed some sort of weapon. If Lucy was awake, the others wouldn't be far behind her. They'd kill her when they found her, she didn't doubt it. She'd find a place to hide and pray for God to deliver her from evil and to look after Charles.

She wondered whether Charles would've woken up by now. How he would feel when he woke up on his own. Whether he could feel anything at all, any more. Then she thought about how the day had gone, and wondered if she seriously expected God to be listening to her in the first place.

She found herself by Charles's room, and pushed open the door. Everything was as he'd left it that morning, quite neat, quite tidy. The room had been his father's. He hadn't changed it much since Roley Snr had died, hadn't imbued the place with his own personality at all. She smiled. He'd said he was going to pose for the dust-jacket photograph in here. Dreams. She'd shared them. Stupid, childish dreams, and at her age, too.

She looked around for a weapon, then something caught her eye. She looked at it more closely, considered it, and found herself suppressing a nervous laugh.

'Oh Lord, you do move in mysterious ways, don't you?'

On the bedside table was the most spiteful weapon she could use against these animals. She picked it up.

***

Fitz cautiously climbed the ladder, his shoulder throbbing painfully. He was grateful for the distraction it caused him. His nerves were so on edge they

were like a line of lemmings ready to jump.

He could make out a dingy light - there was a hatchway up ahead, and it was open. Taylor had got out.

There was no sign of him in the grotty old warehouse on to which the hatch opened out. Then he heard a noise outside, shouting and swearing.

Gripping the gun more tightly, he ran over to see what was happening.

***

Lucy saw that Watson was beginning to stir at last, and leaned over to kiss him, deeply.

'Welcome back, my love,' she said, stroking his cheek.

Watson pushed away her hand. 'Is Taylor here?'

'No.' Lucy was puzzled. 'Only Bulwell.'

'And the Doctor? His little girl? Kreiner's boy?' Watson paused. 'No...' He shook his head. 'No. They've gone.'

'For good, I hope,' said Russell, dragging himself on to his elbows. 'What about this unlimited power you promised? How come they -'

'That's enough out of you, boy,' said Watson. 'You'll have all the power you want, soon enough. Can't you feel it? Taylor's coming.' He inhaled deeply as if appreciating the bouquet of an excellent wine. 'I do believe he's got something for us.'

***

In the light of a street lamp, Taylor was facing down some little hairy feller with a Ford Anglia; by the look of things, the man was objecting fairly vocally to being booted out of his car so that Taylor could get into the driver's seat. When the man came at him with a half-brick, Taylor dubbed him in the throat with his fist, and kept pounding at him.

'Nasty,' muttered Fitz, wincing. Taylor didn't need weird mental powers to hurt anyone - he was a bloody maniac.

It seemed to take an age, but finally Fitz had caught up with him. Now he was hiding behind the back of the car. He risked a peek at the action; no need to worry about the poor sap Taylor was hammering - the only passing on he'd be doing was into the great hereafter, by the look of him. He peered round the car again, squinting down the length of the pistol, getting Taylor in his sights.

Taylor was looking straight back at him.

With a roar of surprise and anger, Taylor flung himself at Fitz - but Fitz was too fast for him, jumping backward out of the way. *Don't let him touch you!* was all he could think of. He fired the gun, but it didn't make a noise - was that normal, or was the thing broken? Was there a safety catch he hadn't noticed? Weren't these things meant to go 'zap'?

Before he knew it, he was legging it down a side street. Taylor wasn't following him, but that wasn't the issue - he was meant to be following Taylor.

The side street joined on to the main road. That gave Fitz an idea.

***

The Doctor scrolled down through masses of information. It seemed that, with the right input codes, the large, glistening black superleech he'd brought from the cavern would be able to perform intelligent healing itself. It sat, looking for all the world like a squat lump of blackcurrant jelly, in its perspex box, and he felt he could kiss it.

But he had to make a decision: would it be quicker to attempt a TARDIS-simulation of the coding frequencies Azoth used to instruct the leech, or should he try to boost the power cells in Azoth himself, bypassing all other functions in the hope that the droid could perform this one last act?

He glanced at Sam, and wondered, and worried. Then he took the sonic screwdriver to Azoth's scorched gold head and activated it.

***

Fitz marched out into the middle of Mile Fjid Road and waved authoritatively at the car heading straight for him, as if hailing a cab.

An old boy pulled up in a brown Wolseley 1500. Hardly an Aston Martin, but it would have to do.

'The name's Kreiner, of the Yard,' said Fitz, flashing his wallet in the bemused man's face, his accent becoming purest Dick Barton off the radio. 'Would you mind stepping out of the vehicle, sir?'

'Why?' said the old man, apparently unimpressed.

'I'm pursuing a felonious... um, felon, and need to requisition your vehicle.' Hopeless! He'd blown it! He smiled anyway, hoping it would come over as a 'Trust me, I keep your streets safe' type of smile.

It didn't. 'You're off your chump,' said the old man.

Fitz produced the pistol, aimed it point-blank at the man's head, squeezed the trigger and closed his eyes. The gun still made no noise, but when Fitz opened his eyes again the man was lying sprawled over the passenger seat, his wispy white hair standing on end.

So. Although he *had* missed the unstable killer lunatic after all, at least the harmless old man was out for the count. He got in the car, and saw the Anglia take the corner and swerve out into the street, speeding past him. He gunned the engine.

'Hang on, Granddad,' he muttered, and screeched away in pursuit.

***

Watson stared out into the night through the hall windows and considered his plan of campaign. At the moment, he was aware it seemed to consist of little more than 'kill people'. Not that there was anything intrinsically wrong with that. He was at war, and war was hell - everyone knew that, and still they carried on regardless. If Watson was to exalt in his new-found powers there, he would need to do more. Much more. Orchestrate a war

against everyone.

What fine 'troops' he had at his disposal - a boy, an old woman and a bit of skirt. Yet look what the four of them had achieved, the breathtaking expanse of the pain they had inflicted on this tiny community.

He was a little worried about Mrs Kreiner. It pained him to have to rely on a sympathiser in the first place, but there was no avoiding that. He'd pushed into her mind, helped her release all the hatred he'd found there, but the old woman had been in poor health anyway. If she lapsed into senility it could be to the detriment of them all. The boy, too, needed to find his backbone, needed to put his shoulder into things more, but Watson was confident that strength would come in time .The boy carried the mark, on his forehead. He was a sign of their provenance over the Earth.

Then there was Lucy - an admirable queen, no question of that. Loyal, loving, and as beautifully misguided as she'd been all her life. She was looking at him now, he could feel it. He smiled at himself in the glass, and she smiled too.

Watson let his mind stare past his reflection, losing its focus in the endless, rainy night outside. When they numbered five, when that petty thug Taylor rejoined them, then men would learn what they could do.

A tiny community of pain. Soon, they could be thinking about all Britain in those terms.

'I think it's time we found our old nurse, isn't it?' Watson announced.

Mrs Kreiner chuckled. 'Perhaps she could make us better again,' she rasped.

***

Fitz swung the Wolseley through the quiet streets. At least he didn't have to worry about losing his way - Taylor seemed to know exactly where he was going, even if he'd apparently forgotten most of the Highway Code.

'Take more care, you sod,' Fitz muttered. 'You'll have the law on me.' He frowned. 'Again.'

His first day of being a fugitive, and was he lying low? No, here he was screeching about the streets of London in a stolen car with an unconscious old man for company.

Act Three was a real wow.

***

The Doctor pushed open the door to the TARDIS butterfly room with his toe, walked in a little way, and gently laid Sam down on the warm, lush grass underneath the perfect blue sky. A pea pod burgundy fluttered down on to her matted hair, then swiftly took off again.

He'd done all he could for her. Using the great chunk of leech matter in the cube as a kind of mediator, he'd allowed just enough energy to build up in Azoth to authorise and instruct the software in Sam's brain to disengage itself. The leech in Sam would now be busy assessing all damage done to itself and to the host brain, prior to taking appropriate steps to delete itself from her system. The leech would become dormant; then he'd fish the wretched thing out.

'I'm sorry, Sam,' he whispered. 'You fought for me, didn't you, all alone again?' He squeezed her hand. "The things I put you through...'

He pressed his lips to her hand, and smoothed damp hair from her forehead. She was far from in the clear. There was a good chance that whole areas of her mind would shut down, unrecoverable, riddled with problems so severe they could never be fixed. Sam herself might not even be strong enough to endure the process. He'd done all he could, but...

A red admiral fluttered softly against his ear, as if whispering a secret. The Doctor smiled.

'Watch over her,' he said, then turned and quietly closed the door behind him.

He strode back to the console room, and noticed that the time rotor had stopped its frenzied interlocking of light and glass. The TARDIS had landed discreetly in the corner of the room that had housed his lab, by the look of

it. Excellent. No long, wet walks - he could crack on straight away.

He patted Azoth on his ruined head. 'Come on,' he said. 'We've got some sleeping lions to tame.'

***

Maria knelt on Charles's four-poster bed, its curtains pulled closed so they boxed her in. Idly, she scrunched up his sheets with both hands. They smelled of him - that funny sandalwood and bookish smell he had. She'd mentioned his scent to him once, hadn't she, one time like many others, hopeful and afraid. And he'd laughed, that fluting nervous laugh of his, and said he'd always spent too much time with his books. His father used to say he should marry one if he was that bloody interested in them. She'd stayed quiet of course. She always had.

She sighed, looking at the quiet white world she'd made for herself behind the curtains. She'd managed to gather a poker, a paper knife and a paperweight for her arsenal. She almost laughed. It was pretty hopeless, she had to admit. But it might delay them, just long enough.

She looked at the empty bottle of Charles's sleeping pills. He had terrible bother in the nights, he'd said, up and down all the time, no sleep, no rest. She'd told him he could come to her whenever he couldn't sleep and they could talk, she wouldn't mind, and he'd said no, he could never impose like that, and she'd said...

No. It didn't matter what she'd said. She was getting quite drowsy now - at least, she thought she was. How long did these things take to work? If they'd just leave her a little longer...

***

Fitz watched from the Wolseley at a safe distance, as the Ford Anglia pulled up in Roley's drive. If what the Doctor had told him was true, then for his mum's sake he couldn't let Taylor get inside that house.

Taylor's stolen car skidded to a halt outside the front door.

You won't have much joy getting in there, thought Fitz, turning off the ignition, patting Granddad on the shoulder and getting out, running for the drawing room.

He had to be ready. He'd get only one chance at this.

***

Maria was lying back on the bed when she heard the soft click of the door opening. In seconds, she was wide awake again and holding her breath.

A theatrical stage whisper sounded up. 'Any nurses in here?'

Lucy. She'd known it would be Lucy who found her, desperate to get her back for what she'd tried to do.

Lucy lampooned Charles's aristocratic voice. '*Crikey* Moses, who's been sleeping in *my* bed?' she said.

The curtains round the bed were whipped away, and Maria shrank back against the headboard, the poker in one hand, the paperweight in the other.

Lucy stood, hands on hips, at the end of the bed and watched her, smiling. 'In his bed at last, eh?'

Maria threw the paperweight as hard as she could. It bounced off the side of Lucy's head, leaving a red mark that began to swell into a bump.

'That'll knock some sense into me,' said Lucy, approvingly. Then a thought seemed to strike her. 'Is that a bouncy bed?'

Maria cried out as Lucy jumped on to the mattress and began springing up and down. She felt the poker twist out of her hand and the paper knife go flying, kicked against Lucy's body as it landed on hers, dug her nails into the woman's cheek, but the wretched woman was still bouncing, laughing like a child.

Maria fell off the bed head first, and scrambled away. Lucy was watching her from the bed, panting a little from her exertions, her straight black hair hanging over her face. 'It's ever so soft, isn't it?' she said, grinning. 'Weren't

you missing out?'

'Leave me alone,' said Maria, backing away until her head bumped against the wardrobe.

'No!' said Lucy, her grin growing wider.

Maria shut her eyes as she heard Lucy jump off the bed, and began murmuring the Lord's Prayer.

'What are you saying?" Lucy asked, suspiciously.

'"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come..."'

'Shut up!' she shouted.

'"And deliver us from -"'

'Shut up, you silly woman!' cried Lucy, pouting, grabbing Maria's cardigan and lifting her up by it. 'He doesn't give a damn about you, and you know it. And you needn't pretend you love God any more. We know. And we're so pleased, we're going to spare your miserable, unhappy life!'

Maria broke off, her eyes flickering open, mouth gaping in baffled disbelief. You... No, you can't mean...' She looked over at the empty pill bottle, then back up at the white round face of her tormentor.

Lucy let go of her and Maria sank to her knees in silence. Then she felt the toe of Lucy's shoe poke her in the ribs.

'For just a few minutes longer,' the witch added.

6.6

Fitz tried not to look at the bundle of body and fabric outside the broken windows as he ran into the drawing room. Seemed a bit of a breach in Watson's security, this hole in the wall; on a hunch, he tried the inner door and found it stuck fast. He nodded grimly, then thought he heard something outside. Taylor was coming. Fitz went to crouch behind the desk as he'd done before.

His mum was down there already, gouging skin from the backs of her hands with her nails.

'I've taken a tumble, Fitzie,' she whined, then grabbed him by the throat, forcing him on to his back. 'You feel a fall so much harder at my age.'

Fitz looked at her, uncomprehendingly, unable to swallow or to draw in air, tears welling up, the gun falling from his hand. Then Taylor loomed into view.

'I told them to expect you,' he said, nodding.

***

The Doctor lifted Roley up on to the wooden surface of the workbench; he wasn't sure it was any more comfortable, but it seemed a little more dignified. He checked the man's eyes, but the pupils weren't responding to light. He slammed his fist against the table, and turned back to Azoth. It was time their friends downstairs were taken care of.

He propped Azoth up against the bench, and took out the sonic screwdriver once again, producing the superleech in its box from his pocket at the same time. Once the initial power was generated by the screwdriver, a quick poke in the diagnostic region -

Azoth's strange, slurred voice suddenly sounded up. 'Terminal solution,' it droned.

He must've sparked off some vestigial power in the droid's circuits. 'Yes, don't worry about that, old chap. That's nowhere, remember?' As he talked,

he made calibrations on the screwdriver, trying to switch Azoth off again.

'Containment program... Assess 'evel of 'ailure..."

'No need for that, no need; said the Doctor, twisting the bulbous tip of the screwdriver round a little further and trying again.

Azoth abruptly stood up, sending the Doctor reeling back against the TARDIS, slamming his head against the corner joist. His head swam. The droid walked straight into the wall, took a step back and did so again, before staggering out into the corridor.

The Doctor recovered to find Azoth gone, and rubbed the back of his bruised head ruefully as he got to his feet. He was always being thrown around these days...

It was possible Azoth would just shamble about blindly, but to be in such close proximity to his own creations... Even when he'd been in the Cave they had called to him from here. Whatever this final solution was, if Azoth judged his work to have failed completely...

The Doctor hurried after him.

***

Fitz woke up to find himself back in the hallway. He wasn't tied up, and no one was watching him.

He realised he was no threat to these people whatsoever. Even so, he wondered why they hadn't just killed him. Let his mum finish what she'd started. The image of her twisted face as she'd squeezed his throat harder and harder - it would haunt him for ever. But with the realisation that that woman, that thing... No way was she his mother. Mum had gone, killed by Watson, by Roley, by God knew how many people. And she'd been so happy when she was offered board here, kept wittering on about how good the food was, how nice it was to have company...

He forced himself to concentrate on what was going on, to think of anything except her, even though a large part of him was pleading to be left in ignorance of what was coming up until it was all over. I must be a

masochist, he thought, and lamented there would be no time now to pursue the more interesting possibilities of that statement under the relaxation bulb in his room back home.

He decided to play possum. From where he was lying, he could see Taylor reaching out to touch Watson's hand. Aye aye, he thought. Watson threw back his head as if he'd been electrocuted, then a broad smile spread over his swarthy features.

'I can feel death,' he said in rapture. 'Feel death tingling all around me.' He shuddered with pleasure, his voice breathy and soft. 'Oh, that's exquisite, that is... A little hell to carry round with you. Here, Lucy, Lucy, *cariad* , feel this.'

Fitz saw Lucy throw her arms round Watson, and then arch her back, moaning with pantomime ecstasy. 'What is that?' she asked, as if a jukebox had started playing some way-out tune.

Taylor stepped forward. 'Apparently we're all prophets and this is the strong voice of the gods.'

'Who told you that?' asked Russell, a surly little sod it seemed, these days, since his new haircut. Lucy pressed the palm of her hand against his cheek and he got whatever it was too, shuddering and smiling.

'A golden man,' said Taylor. 'I thought he was an angel, first of all, but -'

'Angels always talk bollocks,' said Lucy, knowingly.

Taylor shrugged. 'Yeah. Who cares, eh?'

It pained Fitz to see them all being so chummy. He kept thinking of atom bombs. Critical mass, critical mass...

Russell smiled. 'We can give it to anyone.'

Watson slapped him enthusiastically on the back. 'We can give it to everyone , boy.'

Fitz watched in horror as Watson held his old mum by the hand, and she

shook as if having one of her seizures. He closed his eyes. That was it, then. He realty could never hold his mother again. Or rather, what used to be his mother, he reminded himself. Oh Christ...

'But what will it do?' he heard Russell wonder. 'What will it do to people?'

'Glad you asked that, boy,' said Watson. 'I was wondering the same thing myself. That's why I got me a couple of volunteers...'

A couple? Fitz tried to subtly shift the angle of his 'unconscious' body, and then noticed Maria was bundled up with her feet next to his head.

'A couple of sheep for our minefield.' Watson said, with a cheery smile.

***

Maria was nearly gone now, nearly there. She'd always imagined dying would be like floating into a long tunnel of light, and she pictured one now in the hope that it would lead her there faster.

She'd thought she'd believed in God her whole life long, believed He was testing her. But you couldn't believe in Him without believing in the devil, too. Perhaps these really were the devil's children. Perhaps this really was a test.

But, objective for once, she couldn't really see God bothering to waste His time on her like this.

Still, she'd be prepared to be proved wrong, and summoned into her drowsy mind again the tunnel of light. Maybe there was another heaven, a smaller, lesser heaven, one there for the mad, the suicides, the people God wasn't so fond of. She smiled, as the tunnel got brighter and wider. Charles wouldn't be there yet, of course, but he'd arrive there one day.

As usual, she'd be the one doing the waiting.

***

'Let's start with her,' said Lucy, and Fitz breathed a guilty sigh of relief.

'Hey, Nursie,' said Lucy, poking Maria with her foot. 'Wake up. We've got something for you.'

Maria didn't stir. Lucy bent over her and spoke more loudly. ‘Wake... up!' She kicked her. 'Wake up!'

Still nothing.

'No!' shouted Lucy. 'It's not fair!'

'What is it?' Russell wanted to know.

'She won't wake up!' Lucy stamped her foot in frustration on Maria's hand. 'She must've done something to herself.'

'Do it anyway,' whispered the thing Fitz told himself wasn't his mother.

Lucy crouched down, stroking Maria's white pudgy cheeks. 'Won't you wake up, Nurse Bulwell?' she cooed, softly.

At first, there was nothing. Then it was as if someone had poured turps over Maria's body and put a match to her; a strange, stunted blue flame licked her skin and crackled, shrouding her, as if the air around her was burning. Her limbs went into spasm. Fitz was glad he couldn't see Maria's face. When she started screaming, he shut his eyes anyway, tightly.

At last the noise stopped, and the crackling body lay still.

'Oh, wow!' said Lucy, and the others happily murmured their approval.

***

Azoth didn't know how he was moving. He felt dissociated from his body, a lump of intelligence trapped in a burnt-out bowl, motivating his shape forward but with no idea why, where to or for how long.

Life signs were registering. Calling.

***

'Try it on him, too,' said the thing like his mother to Lucy. 'Go on.'

'I wonder if it just spreads through the fingers,' Lucy mused, 'or whether I can use any part of my body.'

Fitz couldn't help opening his tear-filled eyes. He saw Lucy was licking her lips.

'Ssessment check... program 'ailure...'

Fitz turned, sniffed, his eyes widening in surprise. He'd know that excuse for a voice anywhere, but the last time he'd seen him... Perhaps the Doctor had fixed him - perhaps the Doctor was here too. At any rate, it might put this lot off their stroke long enough for him to -

There was a terrible clanking and smashing noise as metal slammed into wood again and again. I don't believe it, thought Fitz. The stupid sod's fallen downstairs!

Watson and the others, Fitz's mum included, all began to laugh.

'Who's this?' asked Watson, genially.

'That's him,' said Taylor. "That's the golden angel that spoke to me.'

A fallen angel.' Lucy was spluttering with mirth.

'The founder of our feast,' said Watson, still acting as if he were hosting a dinner party.

Fitz heard Azoth's voice strike up again, a little faster. 'Taylor units A and B were among those selected for program implementation. You are descended from Taylor unit A. Your program is corrupt.'

Lucy turned to Taylor, smirking. 'It suits you,' she said.

***

The Doctor looked down from the landing. This was not good news. Every

time he left this lot sleeping they were awake before he got back. And now he'd allowed the patients to get hold of their only means of being cured - something that wouldn't be so bad if they'd actually wanted curing in the first place. Now he'd stand as much chance of reclaiming Azoth as a man asking a pyromaniac to part with his matches.

Fitz was down there, and Maria too, like Christians in a den of lions. No Sam to launch into a tried and tested diversion with him, so...

***

Fitz heard someone clearing their throat up on the landing, and risked a look. He'd been right: it was the Doctor, standing as bold as you like on the top stair.

'Please may I have my robot back?' he asked, hopefully.

Watson didn't seem surprised. 'Thought you might be behind this little stunt, Doctor.'

'Is it a gift for us?' Lucy asked, crouching over Azoth, who'd gone silent again. 'Only if it is, you really shouldn't have.' She gestured at Fitz and at Maria's body. 'We already have things to play with.'

'Let them go,' said the Doctor, simply.

'Why?' Lucy asked.

'We don't want to,' said Russell.

'Make us,' Taylor added, Fitz's mother nodding in agreement by his side.

The Doctor stood there, in silence.

'You can't stop us, can you?' said Watson, walking up to the fourth stair. 'You can't raise a finger against us.'

''That machine down there is a weapon,' said the Doctor, his voice a little higher, as Watson climbed another step towards him. 'It can hurt you. I can make it hurt you, if I have to.'

'You seriously expect us to believe you'd throw such a weapon down the stairs?'Another step closer.

'It's part of the arming procedure,' said the Doctor, rather lamely.

Watson was over halfway up the stairs now, but the Doctor was holding his ground, impassive.

'You think of yourself as a good man, don't you, Doctor? Righting wrongs, crusading for justice...'

'I heard how upset you were with the way Roley was treating us through the office door,' Lucy called up. 'I thought you'd be on our side.'

'Yes, how about that, Doctor, eh?'Watson was nearly at the top of the stairs now. 'Defend the underdog until it bites the hand that beats it, then take a stick to it yourself, is that it?'

'That's not true,' said the Doctor. 'What you're doing to people is wrong, evil, you know it is.'

'I fought a war for a country that turned its back on me. Is that not wrong?' stormed the captain, finally losing his cool, his voice getting louder. 'All of us, we've been shunned, despised, looked down on.' He looked down at Maria. 'Abused.'

'You've also been cared for, looked after when you couldn't fend for yourselves...'

'My war wound, my arm, remember?' Watson raged. 'I got that in 1948. Electric-shock therapy, they called it. Broke my ruddy arm, it did.'

The Doctor ignored him, desperately imploring the others to heed him. 'Before you all came here your illnesses were more or less in remission. It is coming here together that has -'

'- liberated us,' said Watson. 'We've been damned all our lives,' he snapped, as if tired of stating the obvious. "The devil holds our souls in his purse.'

The Doctor looked at him, that face that was somehow both supercilious and sympathetic. 'But you don't believe the devil has you now, do you?' he said, softly, shaking his head. 'You're happy to do all this purely for the benefit of Captain Davydd Watson, retired. Aren't you?'

'The world will be a very different place by the time I leave it,' said Watson, restrained once more. 'No good, no bad, no unfairness...'

'Oh yes, I know, just one glorious nothing, yours for evermore...' The Doctor abruptly raised his voice again, calling out to the others like a vicar giving a sermon. 'Listen to me. An evil was placed in you, long ago, and it's made you sick. You were all chosen by that machine down there to be executioners, to destroy a life form that has as much right to exist as any of us. Fate cheated that evil, put it to sleep in your minds, but now it has woken and is getting stronger. You're feeding it between you, magnifying it, engorging it, and it will kill you if you let it. But if you allow me to help you, we can make it sleep for ever. Help me make you well again!'

Now he sounded like an MP seeking re-election. Fitz wondered if any of them would swallow it.

***

Watson clapped, slowly, in response to the Doctor's speech, the noise ringing out around the hall. 'And are you happy, Doctor, with your "normal" life?' he asked.

The Doctor paused. 'I made a choice,' he said, 'and I live by it.'

'Well, Doctor,' said Watson. 'We made a choice, too, didn't we?' He walked up the last step, looking into the Doctor's eyes. 'And you die by it.'

Watson stabbed out a hand to grab the Doctor by the face, but the Time Lord feinted back and kicked Watson's legs from under him. Watson stumbled and fell backward, and the Doctor leapt over him; but, before he could reach the bottom of the stairs. Taylor was there, blocking his path. The Doctor looked to jump over the banister rail, but Russell, Mrs Kreiner and Lucy had gathered below him, arms outstretched to grab him. He whirled round, to find Watson back on his feet, facing him.

He was trapped.

***

Fitz watched as everyone converged on the Doctor. He'd never have a better time to get away.

Behind him was the passage leading to the drawing room; that was no good, hi front of him was his view of the stairs, side-on, and, while his feet pointed to the welded door, his head was pointing to a wall that helped support the landing. A tapestry hung on it, down to the carpet. Maria had caught a corner of it in her death throes, and Fitz could just make out a split in the wooden facade underneath. A door? A cellar or something, maybe; a house like this was bound to have one.

Cautiously, Fitz snaked along the floorboards, his back squarely to Maria's corpse, to inspect the wall more closely.

***

'It's dangerous to play on the stairs, you know,' the Doctor said.

'One touch from any of us, Doctor,' hissed Watson. 'Just one touch...'

Lucy jumped up, trying to grasp the Doctor's ankle. The Doctor recoiled, almost lost his balance, almost grabbed hold of Taylor's outstretched hand to steady himself, but at the last minute fell back against the wall.

'It won't just be me you'll be destroying,' warned the Doctor, 'but any hopes you may have of -'

'Will you listen to me, Doctor?' Watson seemed by now quite exasperated. 'You simply can't reason with us, is that clear?'

'We're mad, you see,' explained Lucy, helpfully.

'We have no hopes,' Watson went on, flexing his fingers in the Doctor's face. 'We don't care for them. We have certainties. We shall grow stronger still, here, in this house. For now, we can only spread our death by touch.'

He gestured over at Maria. 'Soon, we'll be so strong that we need merely will it, Doctor, and it shall be so.' He blew a kiss at Lucy, and turned back to the Doctor. "Then we shall taint all life with our poison.'

The Doctor looked between Watson and Taylor as both reached out for the kill.

Suddenly Azoth buzzed into life again, gripping Mrs Kreiner's leg and pulling her down so she collapsed on top of him. The Doctor seized the distraction, ducking down under Watson's arm, barging past him and running back up the stairs. 'Stop that golden thing,' snarled Watson at Taylor, angrily, before sprinting after the Doctor.

"Inal 'olution,' wailed Azoth, desperately, as Mrs Kreiner tried to free herself from his grip.

Taylor seized the angel's large metal head, and ripped it off.A flutter of blue sparks haloed round the top of the golden neck, and Mrs Kreiner screamed, going rigid. Lucy, Russell and Taylor screamed too.

***

The noise ripped through Fitz. Well, that didn't sound anything like his mum, he told himself, and tried to ignore it. He was the last thing on their mind right now, so he risked standing up to check the wall. Yes, there was a door in it, hidden by the tapestry. He pulled on the wooden doorknob and to his relief it opened.

A flight of steps led down into the dark. He flicked on the light switch and closed the door behind him before dashing down the steps into the cool of the cellar.

***

The Doctor preferred his foes to be slow and inexorable rather than agile and sprightly. Watson was catching him up with ease.

'One touch, g'boy!' he screamed at the Doctor. 'I told you before, just one touch...'

The Doctor felt his coat-tails being pulled, and, without breaking pace, shed the garment. Watson cried out and fell, swearing hoarsely.

The Doctor skidded to a halt at the end of the corridor, and looked. Watson was sprawled out on the floor, clutching his head. The Doctor wondered if he could double back, get to Fitz and Azoth, try to end all this for good.

Then Watson hoisted himself back on to his feet and, with an angry yell, chased after the Doctor again.

***

'What did I do?'Taylor asked, dumbfounded. The air was thick with smoke.

'You electrocuted her, stupid,' Lucy chided, peering at the old woman.

'That thing was a weapon,' Russell said, fearfully. 'Is it dead now?'

'Well, it ain't got no head now, has it?' said Taylor, kicking the golden globe against the wall. "Course it's dead.' He looked at Mrs Kreiner. 'What about her?'

'I think she's all right,' said Lucy.

'Old biddies shouldn't have surprises like that,' said Russell.

'We'll give her a nice surprise when she wakes up,' said Lucy. 'Everyone we've killed today, all strung up for her to have a good laugh at.' She bounded enthusiastically up the stairs. 'Come on. We might still be in time to see Captain Watson kill the Doctor.'

***

The Doctor didn't know where else to go, so he headed for the TARDIS.As he approached the lab room he pulled out his key. Watson was right behind him again.

The Doctor fumbled the key in the lock. With a roar of triumph, Watson lunged for him, just as he fell through the doors and slammed them shut behind him.

'You can't hide in a box for ever, Doctor!' Watson screamed at him. 'I'll burn you alive in there, I will! Smoke you out like a rabbit, and the things I'll do to you then, boy, don't doubt it!'

Finding himself a little shaken, the Doctor left the exterior doors and walked to the console. Watson was right. He couldn't stay in here for ever. Every minute that passed, now, their powers grew greater.

He activated the scanner screen and turned down the volume, watching Watson gibber his threats in silence.

***

Lucy thought on what Watson had said as she galloped along the landing, trying to ignore the dull ache of disappointment. Change was coming - not to the skies as she'd always wanted, but the world beneath it. She'd always longed to sway heaven's judgement over her; if God believed she was good, how swiftly men would follow. But it made bleak sense, this way; how could it be any different? God didn't change His mind. She'd been damned from the moment she was born, and the whole world knew it.

Now the whole world would feel it, too.

***

The Doctor pushed open the door to the butterfly room and smiled in delight. Sam was sitting with her knees tucked under her chin, her arms wrapped round her legs, drowsily rocking herself back and forth on the grass.

'Sam, you're feeling better!'

Her eyes were dull and cloudy, and her skin was covered in red blotches. 'No, I feel like death,' she said.

'Death warmed up?' asked the Doctor, squeezing her hand as if gauging her temperature.

'No,' she answered, closing her eyes. 'Death left to congeal in the back of the fridge in the middle of winter, actually. In the Antarctic.' She rubbed her nose. 'I'm sorry, Doctor, I'm not much use to you at the moment, am I?'

'Just concentrate on getting stronger,' the Doctor said soothingly.

'How's it going, anyway?' she said, her words slurring slightly.'Have we won yet?'

The Doctor smiled, sadly. 'Not quite yet.'

'Doctor... when I feel stronger, will I stop seeing the Beast?'

The Doctor froze. 'You can still see them?'

'Faintly. On you, on me. Only faintly.' She closed her eyes again. 'It's not so bad...'

He stroked her hair. 'It'll fade altogether, soon. The leech inside you has shut down, but the program hasn't finished unravelling itself, yet.' He frowned at her. 'You shouldn't even be awake.'

'I'm not; she assured him. 'You're dreaming.'

Then she fell gently back against the hillock, scattering a number of blue peacocks as she went.

The Doctor rose to his feet. So it had worked, he thought. If Azoth hadn't run off like that, him and his wretched terminal solution... He'd acted as if he was able to instigate it just like that, whereas in the Cavern he'd said it was lost, nowhere...

Suddenly he stood stock still. 'If I configured a comic-book room,' he wondered aloud of the butterflies, 'would light bulbs appear above my head each time I had an idea?'

He ran for the console room.

***

'What's a police box doing in here?' asked Russell, as he, Taylor and Lucy joined Watson in the lab.

Watson shrugged. 'It wasn't here before, that's all I know.' He turned to Lucy. 'The Doctor must've had it moved here. Was that the old woman that knocked me down? She all right?'

'That golden thing did her some damage,' said Lucy. 'But she'll recover.'

Watson nodded, stiffly. 'We're too strong to be hurt, now.'

'We've left her boy downstairs. 'Taylor realised. 'Unguarded.'

'There's nowhere he can go,' said Watson. Then he patted the blue paintwork of the police box's door. 'Just like our friend in the box.'

'What do you think he's up to in there?' asked Taylor.

'Like old Roley', Watson said, jerking a thumb towards the prone figure on the bench. 'Not a lot. Just waiting to die.'

6.66

The Doctor pored over the contents of Azoth's data core once again, this time looking for anything filed under 'Terminal Solution'. He was in with a chance. Azoth hadn't said the program was nowhere, at all: he'd clutched at his head and said it was now here. And that meant that the key details would also be here in the TARDIS data banks.

There. The information was encrypted, of course, but it shouldn't take too long to decipher.

It couldn't. He didn't have too long.

***

Fitz couldn't believe his eyes as he started walking round the cellar. Bottles of wine, hundreds of them, stretched out before him, crammed in from floor to ceiling. Some were thick with cobwebs, dating back forty or fifty years; others had obviously been laid down more recently to be enjoyed in the future. Well, it seemed unlikely anyone would object to his just helping himself. A good drink was exactly what he needed.

Wondering vaguely if he'd already been killed upstairs and hadn't noticed the trip to heaven, Fitz pulled out his Swiss army knife corkscrew and got stuck in.

***

Taylor was hammering on the TARDIS doors, now. The Doctor could hear the blows as he looked up from the translation monitor, rubbing a hand across his lips, calculating probabilities in his head.

'Do you mind?' he yelled at the doors. 'I'm trying to think!' He turned back to the screen. 'How close can you drop me to the hall, old girl?' he asked aloud. 'I wonder...'

***

Taylor backed away as the light on the police box started flashing and an

incredible noise started up, as if the wind had been given a voice to scream with. Before his eyes, the police box was fading away.

'How's he doing that?' cried Lucy. 'It's a trick!'

'He can move it from inside!' roared Watson.

'He's leaving us,' said Lucy, hopefully. 'He's giving up!'

'Rubbish, woman,' retorted Watson. 'He's not the kind that gives up.'

'He's got powers, too,' said Russell, looking nervous.

'Aye, boy, and a charmed life!' Watson ushered them out of the room. 'Now, fan out! He won't be going far!' He paused in the doorway as the others headed off in different directions. 'The boy!' he yelled after them. 'He'll be looking for Kreiner's boy!'

***

Fitz sat on a large crate in the middle of the cold flagstone floor and drained a bottle of some fancy wine with a stupid name. It tasted pretty foul, to be honest, but he was comforted by the fact it must've been hugely expensive and not a bad vintage. Wouldn't be here, otherwise.

Suddenly, Fitz felt his stomach lurch as he distantly heard a grating, wheezing noise. It was the Doctor's ship. He'd got away. Or had Watson nicked the keys off his corpse and taken it for a spin himself?

As stealthily as he could with a bottle of posh red inside him, Fitz crept up the stairway.

***

The TARDIS had brought the Doctor to the top of the hall stairs. The scanner showed the landing to be empty. He patted the console and opened the doors.

Cautiously, he looked out. While he'd been crossing to the doorway, Lucy had turned the landing corner and was galloping towards him. He bolted

through the doors, dashing to get to the stairs before she did, then taking them four at a time.

'Stop being such a bore!' she yelled at him. 'Stay where you are and let us kill you!'

The Doctor didn't waste time bothering to reply. He took in the decapitated Azoth, glanced at Fitz's mother lying prone by the robot's side, panicked for a moment, then spied the head lying by the far wall, next to Maria. As Lucy hoisted her dress and ran down the stairs, he dashed over and scooped it up. He didn't need to examine Maria closely to realise the woman was dead.

'Doctor?'

The Doctor blinked. It seemed the wall was talking to him.

'Do you know anything about wines?'

The Doctor allowed himself the smallest of smiles. A little.' He peered under the tapestry, as a door opened inward and Fitz stared out at him.

'Get yourself in here, then,' Fitz said.

***

When Lucy reached the bottom of the stairs, she saw the swinging tapestry but no sign of the Doctor.

Cautiously, she moved towards it. A dangerous man, this Doctor. None of the tricks they'd tried on Cynthia, Bulwell and Roley seemed to work on him. It was as if he put up some kind of barrier around his mind to keep them out.

'A mouse,' Mrs Kreiner said, weakly. 'In the wainscoting. He went through there."

Silently, Lucy looked for herself. Well, well. A door in the wall. One way in and no way out.

She shut her eyes and summoned the others. They'd all want to be in on this one.

***

Fitz looked glumly at Azoth's head in the Doctor's arms. 'What did you bring that for?'

'I thought it would make a nice punch bowl,' said the Doctor. 'Now, quickly, what can we use as a barricade? They know where we are, now.'

'Well...' Fitz made a great show of looking about him. "There's one or two bottles of wine lying around.'

'We'll use the racks. Good idea.'

Together, they hefted some of the empty racks and wedged them up against the door.

'That'll hold them for about two minutes,' said Fitz, surveying their handiwork.

'Then I'd better see if I can beat my record for stripping down positronic brains,' answered the Doctor, using the intelligent scalpel he'd used to cut out Fitz's leech to score a large hole in the blackened head. 'About three point two four minutes, if I recall correctly.'

'That thing is really dead now, I take it,' said Fitz.

'I hope not. I'm relying on a couple more dying breaths,' said the Doctor, airily, glancing up. 'If he is dead, then so are we.'

***

Sam clutched hold of the door to the butterfly room for support as she ventured out into the corridor. She hated feeling useless, weak and ill. She'd seemingly done little but recuperate lately; after Janus Prime, Belannia, Proxima n. She was sick of being sick, and on current form she'd need a hefty convalescence period to cope with that realisation too.

Her head swam about her as she reached the console room. She called for the Doctor, but he wasn't there. She'd put the kettle on, make him a cup of Darjeeling. Just as soon as she stopped seeing two or three of everything, anyway. She'd make it across to the armchair, rest easy for a couple of moments...

***

Watson sauntered along the landing to the hallway. The Doctor had wasted their time, made a fool of them all. His death would be long and leisurely. It was the early hours of Sunday now, after all. The day of rest.

He took in the police box, standing incongruously by the stair rail. It was ludicrous - how could something like that possibly move anywhere at all?

Then he noticed the door was ajar.

***

'What are you trying to do, anyway?' asked Fitz.

'I'm glad you asked,' said the Doctor, brightly. 'I approve of an inquiring mind. It's my sonic screwdriver.' He inserted a short, wandlike instrument into the hole in the robot's head. 'Azoth's final solution. I've discovered what it is.'

'Go on then,' said Fitz, wearily, swigging from another bottle of wine and smacking his lips.

'It's crude, but horribly effective. A bioelectrical pulse, transmitted from Azoth's brain. A bit like lobotomising with a cleaver - it switches people off, just like that.' He clicked his fingers as he finished speaking. 'And it's self-replicating, increasing exponentially. The energy released by the pulse shutting down the brain propels it telepathically to whoever's nearby.'

'Your critical-mass theory, again,' noted Fitz. Suddenly, he did a double take. 'Jesus, it can do all that and you're trying to get it started?'

'Not exactly,' said the Doctor, making minute adjustments to his sonic screwdriver.

Fitz watched him work, both impressed by and slightly resentful of his skill. 'Why didn't Azoth set it all going the moment he arrived here? That would've sorted out his problems.'

The Doctor removed a complex latticework of crystals from the metal shell and peered at it. 'That's like an exterminator blowing up your house because it's got a cockroach infestation,' he said. 'Azoth wasn't a butcher. His directives insisted he disrupt the civilisations he came across as little as possible.'

'Even so,' said Fitz, taking another swig. 'Makes you wonder how many planets he gave up on and wiped out before going on to the next.'

'Quite. I agree he wasn't a hundred per cent warm and cuddly.' The Doctor tentatively tapped on a crystal deep in the lattice, and sighed. 'What a mess...'

'Doctor,' announced Fitz, suddenly, 'Not wanting to cause disappointment later on by cocking up, I want you to know I am totally out of my depth.'

'Best way to learn,' the Doctor assured him.

'But I don't want to learn!'

'Best go to university, then.'

A loud banging started up on the cellar door. Fitz and the Doctor looked at each other.

'The final assault,' said the Doctor. 'It's started.'

***

'Doctor! Can you hear me in there, Doctor?'

Watson ripped away the tapestry from the small door in the wall, flanked now by Lucy, Taylor, Waller and Mrs Kreiner.

'I'm sorry?' The Doctor's voice floated up from the cellar. 'You'll have to

speak up - I can't hear you.'

Watson smiled. 'It's quite a hall of mirrors you've got up there, Doctor.'

***

The Doctor stopped what he was doing and slapped his forehead. "The TARDIS. In the rush I didn't close the -' He broke off and called out. 'Sorry, Watson, I don't know what you're talking about. That's just a police box. Perhaps you're insane or something.'

Fitz shivered as Watson laughed. 'Insane or not, I found something in there, Doctor.'

The Doctor and Fitz looked at each other.

'Go on, speak to him, girl.'

They heard a muffled groan. Even in the pale light of the cellar, Fitz could see the colour drain from the Doctor's face.

'Sam,' he whispered.

***

'Come out and face me, Doctor. Now. Or the girl dies. 'Watson paused, grabbing hold of Sam's fringe - taking care not to touch her skin just yet - and pulling her head about for scrutiny. 'Best be quick about it, too - she's not looking too clever as it is.'

'Watson!' the Doctor yelled. 'Listen to me, my hall of mirrors: it's a time machine, a spaceship.'

***

'What are you telling him that, for?' hissed Fitz.

'I just need a little more time,' said the Doctor, feverishly making fractional adjustments to the crystal circuits.

***

Watson enjoyed hearing the fear in the Doctor's voice. "That's a little desperate, isn't it, Doctor?'

'It happens to be true, although your cynicism does you credit. 'The Doctor babbled on, while Watson tried to coax some response out of Sam, pale and sweating at his feet. 'Most villains ask me to ferry them round the universe destroying things. I have to turn them down, of course...'

'There's only one thing I want from you, Doctor,' Watson called backhand that's your head on a stick.'

'Would you mind if I provided the stick myself? Only I'm terribly fussy about hygiene...'

***

The Doctor was still working frantically as he talked. 'Nearly there,' he muttered.

'Why are they stringing it out like this?' wondered Fitz.

'Until they're strong enough to transmit this taint of theirs by thought alone, they'll be at something of a loose end.' He smiled faintly. "The 1960s. We're still in the good old days of live entertainment.'

'You still haven't told me what you're doing,' grumbled Fitz.

'Later.'

Fitz grabbed the Doctor by the shoulder and spun him round, his voice rising. 'There isn't going to be a later.'

'All right, all right,' said the Doctor. "There's barely any energy left at all in these circuits, enough for a short range pulse only.'

'The Terminal Solution?' Fitz started. 'But that'll kill us - you, me, Mum, everyone.'

'Enough talk, Doctor,' came Watson's voice from behind the door. 'Come out and face me, now, or I mean it, I'll kill her.'

'I rather think you'll kill her no matter what I do,' the Doctor said.

Lucy decided to join in. 'We want you to see her die right there in front of you.'

'You're not really selling it to me, I'm afraid,' the Doctor called, casually. 'Why don't you just come and get me?'

Watson again. 'I want you to acknowledge yourself that it's your futile love of life that's brought you to your death. Shamed on your knees, before me. Now.'

'Oh, but I've just opened a rather cheeky little Chablis,' protested the Doctor. 'Tell you what, I'll pour everyone a glass and meet you up there in a moment.' The Doctor turned to Fitz, his voice low. 'I've changed the wavelengths so it will only affect those carrying the leech.'

Fitz stared at him, hurt and confused, his thoughts thick with too much wine. 'You're going to kill my mum,' he said in a small voice.

'Your mother's already dead, Fitz. She's gone. I know it's difficult, but...'

'You were going to help them,' Fitz argued. 'You said you'd make them better.'

'It's too late!' said the Doctor, his eyes grey shadows on his face. 'Critical mass, "boom", remember? The power build-up, it's irreversible.'

'No! Why should I believe you? The image of his mum throttling the life out of him broke its way back into his mind, driving him crazy. 'And what about Sam? The leech is in her, too.'

The Doctor turned back to his work. 'Fitz, please, if we don't stop them now, they'll -'

'What's with this "we" business?' said Fitz, angrily. 'Don't bring me into this, this isn't "we", this is just "you". It's always what you want, like Maria said

before she got killed, isn't it?' The Doctor said nothing, and Fitz came to a decision. 'She's still my mum, Doctor!'

'I told you, she isn't. '

'How can you be sure? '

Fitz tried to grab the Doctor by the lapels, knocking him back against the wall, just as the pounding started up again on the cellar's heavy oak door. Already, the wood was beginning to splinter. The Doctor held the crystal above his head as he tried to push Fitz away, their struggle pulling them down one of the musty aisles.

'There's no time for this,' the Doctor shouted, twisting free abruptly and sending Fitz sprawling into a wine rack that collapsed beneath his weight. His body crashed heavily to the floor along with several bottles, but the sound couldn't drown out the noise of the banging on the door.

The Doctor checked that Fitz was only unconscious, then studied the crystal again, as shadowy figures began to insinuate themselves from the dark corners of the cellar. Huge, grey monochrome images of Watson and Lucy, looming large with Sam between them, her head bowed, saved from collapse only by Lucy's tight grip on her hair.

'Broadcast live, Doctor,' came Watson's voice from the hallway, though the apparition in front of him mouthed along to the words. 'I wouldn't want you to miss this.'

The Doctor could see Fitz's mother standing behind them, mutely. Presumably Taylor and Russell were beating down the door. And now Sam had been jolted awake. He looked down at the crystals as she started to scream and the door began to rip off its hinges.

Activating the sonic screwdriver, sending a focused loop of energy into the circuits, he closed his eyes.

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'We're nearly through!' Russell reported, eagerly. 'We're so strong...'

'Only the beginning, lad,' said Watson. 'You hear that, Doctor?' he called. 'We'll hunt you down like a dog!'

'And let's make this little bitch bark louder,' said Lucy.

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The Doctor looked up in horror. Nothing had happened. The huge projection of Sam, her eyes wide and tears flowing down her stone-grey face, towered over him. He heard the door cave in, and a shout of triumph.

The lattice was dead, not enough energy even for short range. The Doctor held the crystals to his forehead and the screwdriver to the crystals, concentrating, shutting out the din: Sam's loudest scream yet, heavy racks of wine being thrown down the cellar steps, Lucy's wild racing laughter, boots crashing and echoing around the stone walls as they drew nearer, nearer -

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Lucy's laughter turned to choking, thick, heavy coughs ripping out of her, as a thick gout of blood erupted from the back of her head. Watson turned and saw her black hair frazzle to her scalp like a spark along fuse wire, her eyes fixing his with outraged accusation before they turned milky white and burst all over her face.

The girl fell from Lucy's grasp. As Mrs Kreiner shouted for her son, it was Watson's scream that took up where Sam's had left off.

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The Doctor looked up to see Taylor and Russell staggering backward away from him, blood pouring from their heads and drenching their bodies, shouting incoherently in their pain and confusion. They gripped each other, convulsing and shuddering like wet dogs shaking water from their coats. Pushing past them, the Doctor sprinted up the cellar steps.

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'Sam!'

She was lying face down on the floor, Watson hunched over her. He looked up at the Doctor's cry, trembling, less substantial now than his ghost had been in the cellar.

'Doctor -' he began, holding out his hand once more. Begging for help, this time.

The Doctor watched as Watson slowly toppled over, collapsing back on to Lucy's corpse. The captain's head hit the floor and shattered into dust.

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Crouching by Sam, the Doctor rocked on his heels, listening to the heavy ticking of Roley's clocks marking the silence. Minutes stretched past. Wisps of foul-smelling smoke drifted about the hall.

'We apologise for the loss of usual cheesy wisecracks,' Sam whispered to the floorboards. Gently, the Doctor eased her round, into his arms. She smiled, her lips chapped and cracked. 'Normal service will be resumed... probably...'

Sam fell unconscious, her head on the Doctor's lap.'Your leech had shut down,' he muttered to himself, sighing with relief.

There was a noise behind him. He turned as Fitz came to the top of the cellar steps, not looking anywhere but at the Doctor.

'Well,' Fitz said, rubbing the back of his head. 'That seems to have worked, then, doesn't it?'

Epilogue

They telephoned the police and they left; it was as simple as that. They never hung around anywhere for long. The Doctor was always ready to move on as soon as he could, and Sam always went along with it. This time, however, the Doctor had something he wanted to do before turning his back on the whole affair.

'And now?' he asked.

Sam squinted into the London sunshine of 2134, the sky still blue, half obscured by the colossal buildings reaching up to touch it. People dironged the pedestrianised streets, talking, laughing, going about their business as they had always done. No one seemed particularly bothered by a battered blue police box obstructing their way.

'Unless my sight's gone back to normal sooner than you reckoned it would... No,' Sam said, finally. 'No Beast on any of them.'

The Doctor beamed. 'I thought they'd have to have moved on by now. The Dalek invasion thirty years from now decimated humanity. The feeding needs of the Beast would've killed off the survivors, just as they did the Benelisans all that time ago.'

'But instead, our super fleas got all the energy they wanted and lived to hop another day.' She peered at him. "They've left you, too, by the way.'

'That'll be the TARDIS, I imagine,' said the Doctor. 'When we left 1963, we left the dimensional intersection behind us.'

He closed the doors and flicked a few switches on the console, sending the TARDIS on its way. Sam came over and stood next to him.

'And now there's a cuckoo in our nest,' she said.

'Really?' asked the Doctor, his head cocked to one side. 'Where?'

Sam rolled her eyes. 'You know perfectly well what I mean.'

The Doctor smiled. 'You're worried whether our newcomer fits in?'

'Stop dodging the issue with crap puns,' said Sam. Tentatively, she took his hand. 'Things won't be quite the same, will they?'

The Doctor's shoulders slumped. 'I suppose there will be a longer queue for the bathroom each morning,' he said.

Sam ignored him and stood on tip-toes, looking into his eyes. 'No more just you and me.'

The Doctor looked at her for some time, before the ghost of a smile crept on to his face. His voice was barely more than a breath. 'I didn't want to just leave him behind.'

Sam nodded and took a step back. 'It was a mess, wasn't it? All that, and the only other person left alive has his head scrambled,' she said. 'And he never even carried the poxy leech.'

'Roley will be cared for,' said the Doctor. 'Where there's life, there's always hope.' He paused. 'Hopes . No matter what the likes of Watson may say.'

Sam's looked at him, searching his eyes for some clue as to how he was really feeling. 'Fitz's mum screamed for him when she died,' she said, finally.

The Doctor looked down at the console, 'I know.'

'You told him she never felt a thing.'

'Would it have profited him to have known otherwise? "The Doctor seemed to be putting the question to a couple of dials, still refusing to look up. 'Would it have made it any easier for him?'

'It might have comforted him to know she'd become his mother again before the end.'

'She hadn't,' said the Doctor, firmly, looking at her now. 'Her brain was like the others, a balloon filling with water. It could've burst at any moment.'

'I know...' she said, softly, placing her hand back on his, listening to the whirrs and clicks of the TARDIS. 'I know.' She moved away.

'And you know that, sometimes, we all have to make decisions, Sam,' called the Doctor.

Sam turned to look at him, standing forlornly by the console. She nodded, smiling faintly, before walking off to her room. 'I know ', she said.

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Fitz looked around the room that would now be his. It was pretty bare, at the moment, but that would soon change. The Doctor had the most incredible amount of stuff lying around, there for the taking. In the room where he'd dumped the remains of Azoth, Fitz had already found bags of gold, tape recorders that used tiny little discs, swimming pools and saunas, a 1957 strat signed by Elvis, even a giant double bed with a radio, a clock with no hands and little spotlights built into the headboard. Fab.

There was nothing waiting back home for him now. His mum had been taken from him - by Azoth, Roley, Watson, they all shared the blame. The Doctor had just wound up dealing with it - Fitz had come to terms with that. Now all he had to do was come to terms with what she'd become. Yeah. No problem. For sure.

He focused instead on his situation. No job, after bunking off like that - not that he'd stay around there if his life depended on it. No prospects - well, no change there. The police were still after him, of course - he was, in actual fact, now officially on the run. Well, good luck to them in finding him now. The Doctor had offered him a way out, and he'd taken it. An intergalactic fugitive on a bus that had planets and centuries for request stops. I am Fitz, from beyond the stars. On my planet, it is customary to shag by way of civilised greeting...

He smiled to himself, closing the door and mooching along the corridor to begin a new life.

Arthur Flannen may have thought he was Dixon of Dock Green, thought PC John Sparrow, but his nick sheet told a different story. While Sparrow had been itching to get on Kreiner's case, Flannen had called their chief suspect small fry that would keep. He'd insisted instead on tracking down and questioning Teddy Withers's many dubious acquaintances, practically all of whom had stronger motives to knock him off than Kreiner but cast-iron alibis to exonerate themselves.

Back on the trail, he watched the older man tap on the Wolseley's window. He hated the early shift.

'Excuse me, sir,' said Flannen. 'Would you like to tell me what you're doing sleeping in a car outside someone's private property?'

Sparrow noticed his pale reflection in the car windows, and grimaced. No wonder his girlfriend had dumped him, fed up of dating a pizza'. Well, when he was sergeant...

The window wound down, and an old man struggled to stick his head out. 'I was attacked!' he said. 'Kidnapped! One of your lot, he said he was, Kreiner of the Yard...'

'Kreiner?' Flannen looked at Sparrow knowingly. 'We wish to question Mr Kreiner in relation to another offence, sir. While I go to question the lad's mother, perhaps you'd be so kind, Constable Sparrow, as to take the gentleman's statement.'

'Right, Sarge,'' sighed Sparrow, wearily.

He paid only half a mind to the old man's ramblings, watching instead Flannen as he tried the front door, then moved round the back, disappearing from sight. A couple of moments later he dashed back round the corner.

'Sparrow! Get yourself round here now!'

'Excuse me, sir,' he said, interrupting the tirade of complaints, and jogged over.

The woman had been slung through the windows. Sparrow was glad he

hadn't had any breakfast yet. Flannen was looking pale and sweaty.

'I'll radio for backup, Sarge,' said Sparrow.

Flannen nodded. 'You do that, lad. Meantime, we're going in.'

'Sarge?'

'We'll watch out for each other, all right?'

The call put in, Sparrow followed his sarge inside.

The house was gloomy, and smelled of burnt roast dinners. A passage led to the hallway. It looked as if a bomb had gone off in the middle of a massacre. There were four bodies lying there, bodies like he'd never seen before. His throat was so dry he couldn't even croak to Flannen that he was going to be sick.

Flannen had waited for him while he crouched over a plant pot, and, when he felt his stomach was up to exploring the rest of the house, Sparrow followed his sergeant up the stairs.

The rooms were all empty, it seemed, the murderer long gone, but then he heard Flannen yell at someone in a room at the end of the landing. 'Hold it! Stay right where you are!'

He rushed to join him. A man was lying on a table in the dark. 'What is it?' the man said. He had a posh voice, high-pitched and alarmed. 'What are you doing? Please don't shout, my head is-'

Sparrow tried the light switch but there was no bulb in place. He turned on his torch, shone it in the man's face.

'Who are you? Police?' The man seemed confused, off his face. Sparrow heard sirens, felt relief trickle through him. He crossed to the heavy curtains and pulled them open.

As light poured into the room, the man started screaming, screaming like a raving maniac, his pinched-up face all blue and bruised, wild-eyed and staring.

'Get the backup here, pronto,' Flannen snapped. 'I'll keep an eye on this one.'

Sparrow left the room, his legs shaking as he walked down the landing. The man was still babbling in between his screams, but Flannen was shouting him down.

'What do you mean they're all over us, what are, what are you talking about? Don't try that with me, mate, the only things you'll have all over you are the arrows on your prison suit. Oh, you're going down for what you've done, you are, my son. All the way down.'